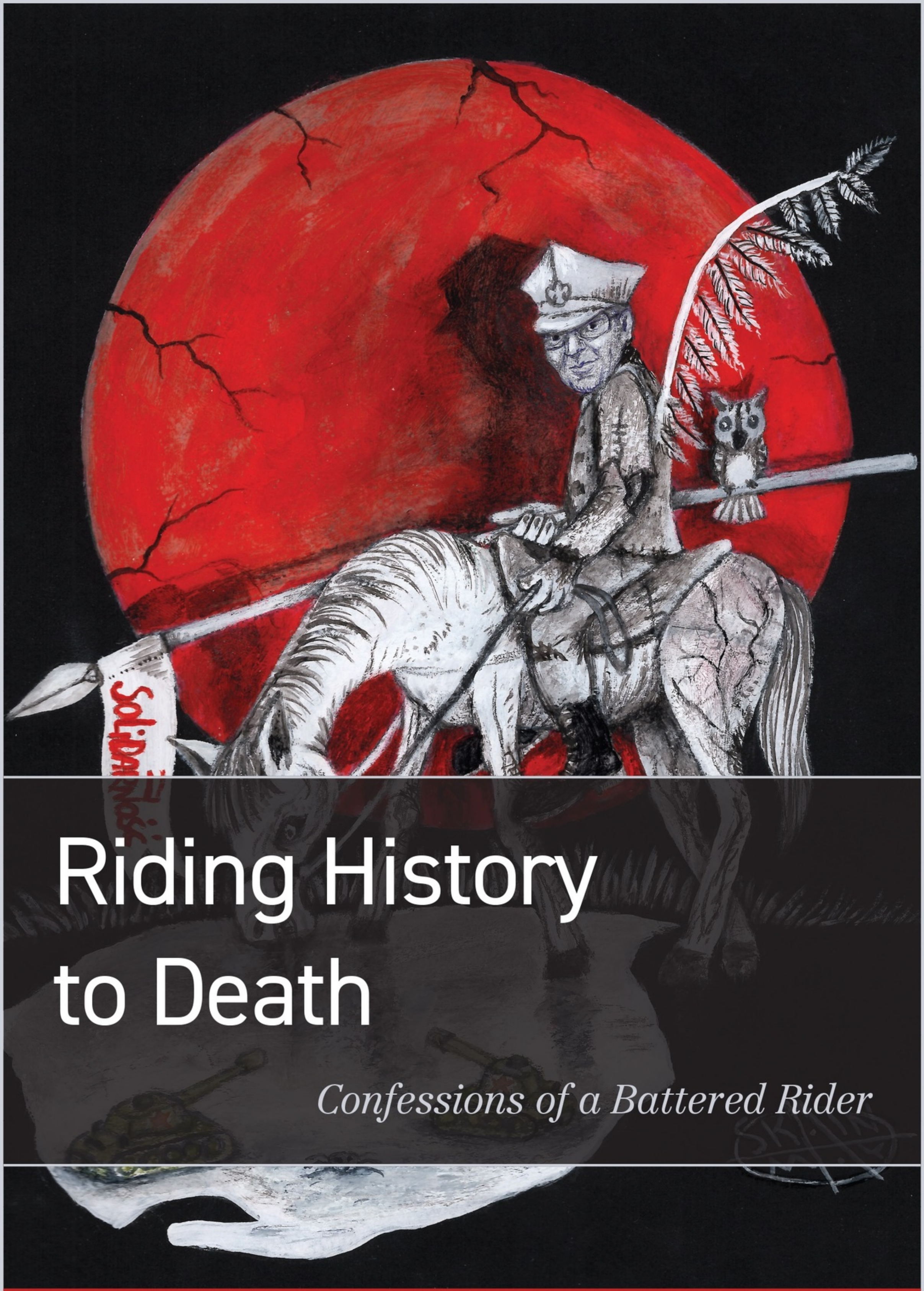

Riding History to Death

Confessions of a Battered Rider

KAROL MODZELEWSKI

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY FRANK L. VIGODA
INTRODUCTION BY IRENA GRUDZIŃSKA GROSS

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To my dearest ones

Glossary of Abbreviations and Local Names

ABW, Agencja Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego, Internal Security Agency (after 1989)

AK, Armia Krajowa, Home Army (World War II)

AL, Armia Ludowa, People's Army (World War II)

"Archimedes," tool and pneumatic device factory in Wrocław

"Aspa," welding implements factory in Wrocław.

AWS, Akcja Wyborcza "Solidarność," "Solidarity" Electoral Action (a political party, after 1989)

Barczewo, Zakład Karny w Barczewie (penitentiary for first-time offenders in Barczewo near Olsztyn)

BHP, Bezpieczeństwo i higiena pracy, occupational safety and health

Białołęka, internment camp and prison in Białołęka at the outskirts of Warsaw

"Bumar," multifactory arms production corporation

CBA, Centralne Biuro Antykorupcyjne, Central Anti-Corruption Bureau (after 1989)

CGIL, Confederazione Generale Italiana de Lavoro, Italian trade union center

ChSS, Chrześcijańskie Stowarzyszenie Społeczne, Christian Social Association (1957–1989)

CISL, Confederazione Italiana Sindicati Lavori, Italian association of Christian trade unions

Comecon, RWPG, Rada Wzajemnej Pomocy Gospodarczej, trade alliance of communist countries (1949 –1991)

Copper Basin, Zagłębie miedziowe, industrial region in Lower Silesia

CRZZ, Centralna Rada Związków Zawodowych, Central Council of Trade Unions (1949–1980)

DiP, Konwersatorium "Doświadczenie i Przyszłość," "Experience and Future" think tank (1979–1982)

"Dolmel," electromechanical factory in Wrocław

“Elmor,” factory of electrical and automatic devices for ships in Gdynia

“Elwro,” Wrocławskie Zakłady Elektroniczne Mera-Elwro, computer factory in Wrocław.

“Fadroma,” Fabryka Maszyn Drogowych, road construction machinery factory in Wrocław

FSO, Fabryka Samochodów Osobowych, car factory in Żerań, Warsaw

Gazeta Wyborcza, major daily newspaper in Poland (since 1989)

Gdynia Shipyard, Stocznia im. Komuny Paryskiej in Gdynia

Huta imienia Lenina, or Nowa Huta, large steelworks in Nowa Huta near Kraków

Huta “Katowice,” Katowice Steelworks

Huta “Stalowa Wola,” steelworks in Stalowa Wola

Huta “Warszawa,” Warsaw Steelworks

“Hutmen,” copper products factory in Wrocław

“Hydral,” aviation components factory in Wrocław

IPN, Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Institute of National Remembrance (after 1989)

Izvestia, daily newspaper of record in the Soviet Union (1917–1991)

Jasna Góra, shrine with the Black Madonna icon at Jasna Góra in Częstochowa, a destination of pilgrimages

Jastrzębie, or Jastrzębie-Zdrój, town in Upper Silesia, home of the Upper Silesian “Solidarity” region

KC, Komitet Centralny, Central Committee of the PUWP (1948–1989)

Kedyw, Kierownictwo Dywersji, Directorate of Diversion (World War II)

KIK, Klub Inteligencji Katolickiej, Catholic Intelligentsia Club (organization)

KK, Komisja Krajowa, Countrywide Commission of “Solidarity” (after the “Solidarity” Congress, September–December 1981)

KKP, Krajowa Komisja Porozumiewawcza, Countrywide Coordination Commission of “Solidarity” (1980–1981, before the “Solidarity” Congress)

KKW, Krajowa Komisja Wykonawcza, Countrywide Executive Commission of “Solidarity” (since October 1987)

KO “S,” Komitet Obywatelski “Solidarności” przy Lechu Wałęsie, “Solidarity” Citizens’ Committee with Lech Wałęsa (above-ground advisory board, 1988–1990)

KOD, Komitet Obrony Demokracji, Committee for the Defense of Democracy (since 2015)

KOK, Komitet Obrony Kraju, Committee for the Defense of the Country (military structure)

"Konrad," copper mine in Iwiny, Copper Basin, Lower Silesia, a part of the Bumar corporation

KOR, Komitet Obrony Robotników, Committee for the Defense of Workers (later KSS "KOR," the Committee for the Self-Defense of the Society KOR, 1976–1981)

KPRP, Komunistyczna Partia Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej, Communist Party of the Republic of Poland (1918–1938)

Krasnaya Zvezda, official Soviet and Russian Army daily newspaper (since 1924)

Kultura, or *Kultura paryska*, leading emigre literary-political monthly published in Paris (1947–2000)

Kultura, literary weekly published in Warsaw (1963–1981)

KZ, Komisja Zakładowa, Factory Commission of "Solidarity" (1980–1989)

Le Monde, French liberal daily

LPR, Liga Polskich Rodzin, League of Polish Families (political party, post-1989)

L'Unita, daily newspaper of the Italian Communist Party

"Manifest Lipcowy," coal mine in Jastrzębie-Zdrój, Upper Silesia

mkk, Mały Kodeks Karny, Little Penal Code (active 1946–1969)

MKS, Międzyzakładowy Komitet Strajkowy, Inter-Factory Striking Committee (1980)

MKZ, Międzyzakładowy Komitet Założycielski, Inter-Factory Founding Committee of "Solidarity" (1980)

MO, Milicja Obywatelska, Citizens' Militia, also referred to as the militia (1944–1990)

Mokotów. See *Rakowiecka*

MPK, Miejskie Przedsiębiorstwo Komunikacyjne, public transportation authority in Wrocław

MPO, Miejskie Przedsiębiorstwo Oczyszczania, city maintenance authority in Warsaw

MSW, Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych, Ministry of Internal Affairs

MZK, Miejskie Zakłady Komunikacyjne, public transportatation authority in Warsaw

ND, Narodowa Demokracja, “endecja,” National Democracy (interwar period)

Nowa Kultura, weekly published in Warsaw (1950–62)

NSZZ, Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy “Solidarność,” Independent Self-Governing Trade Union “Solidarity” (official full name of “Solidarity”)

NSZZ-RI, Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy Rolników Indywidualnych “Solidarność,” Independent Self-Governing Trade Union of Individual Farmers “Solidarity”

NZS, Niezależne Zrzeszenie Studentów, Independent Students’ Union (from 1980)

OKP, Obywatelski Klub Parlamentarny, Citizens’ Parliamentary Caucus (1989–1991)

OPZZ, Ogólnopolskie Porozumienie Związków Zawodowych, All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions (trade unions’ federation, from 1984)

ORMO, Ochotnicza Rezerwa Milicji Obywatelskiej, Voluntary Reserve of Citizens’ Militia (paramilitary organization, before 1989)

“Ossolineum,” Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, library, scholarly institution and publisher in Wrocław

“PaFaWag,” Państwowa Fabryka Wagonów, railroad car factory in Wroclaw

PAN, Polska Akademia Nauk, Polish Academy of Science

PAX, Stowarzyszenie PAX, communist-approved Catholic organization (from 1947)

PC, Porozumienie Centrum, Center Alliance (political party, after 1989)

PGR, Państwowe Gospodarstwo Rolne, State Agricultural Farm (before 1989)

“Pilmet,” factory of agricultural machinery in Wrocław

PiS, Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, Law and Justice (political party, after 1989)

PKWN, Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego, Polish National Liberation Committee (1944)

PO, Platforma Obywatelska, Civic Platform (political party, after 1989)

Politechnika Warszawska, Warsaw Technical University

“Polkowice,” copper mine in Polkowice, Lower Silesia

“Ponar,” industrial corporation.

“Ponar”-Ostrzeszów, Fabryka Urządzeń Mechanicznych, mechanical device factory in Ostrzeszów, eighty kilometers northeast of Wrocław

“Ponar”-Wrocław, Fabryka Automatów Tokarskich, lathe factory in Wrocław

Po Prostu, social-literary weekly published in Warsaw (1947–1957)

PPR, Polska Partia Robotnicza, Polish Workers’ Party (1942–1948)

PPS, Polska Partia Socjalistyczna, Polish Socialist Party (pre–World War II)

PPS-WRN, Polska Partia Socjalistyczna—Wolność, Równość, Niepodległość, Polish Socialist Party—Freedom, Equality, Independence (World War II)

Pravda, official daily newspaper of the Soviet communist party (since 1912)

“Predom-Polar,” home appliance factory in Wrocław

PRL, Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa, People’s Republic of Poland (1944–1989, referred to as the People’s Poland, or communist Poland)

PZKS, Polski Związek Katolicko-Społeczny, Polish Catholic-Social Union (1981–2004)

PZPR, Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, Polish United Workers Party, PUWP (referred to as “the Party” throughout the book, 1948–1989)

Rakowiecka, or Mokotów, official name: Centralne Więzienie Warszawa 1 (Central Prison Warsaw 1), investigation jail at Rakowiecka Street in the Mokotów district of Warsaw

“RaWar,” Warszawskie Zakłady Radiowe RAWAR, radar equipment factory in Warsaw

RKS, Regionalny Komitet Strajkowy, Regional Striking Committee of “Solidarity” (August 1980, and after December 13, 1981)

ROPCiO, Ruch Obrony Praw Człowieka i Obywatela, Movement for Defense of Human and Civic Rights (1977–1981)

RWE, Radio Wolna Europa, Radio Free Europe

RZM, Rewolucyjny Związek Młodzieży, Revolutionary Union of Youth (1956–1957)

SB, Służba Bezpieczeństwa, Security Service (1956–1990)

SD, Stronnictwo Demokratyczne, Alliance of Democrats (political party)

SDKPiL, Socjaldemokracja Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy, Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (political party, pre–World War I)

SDP, Stowarzyszenie Dziennikarzy Polskich, Union of Polish Journalists (from 1951)

SdRP, Socjaldemokracja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (political party, after 1989)

SKM, Szybka Kolej Miejska (rapid transit trains in the Gdańsk region)

SKN, Społeczny Komitet Nauki, Civic Committee for Science (underground educational organization, 1983–1989)

SLD, Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, Democratic Left Alliance (political party, after 1989)

SP, Solidarność Pracy, Solidarity of Labor (political party, after 1989)

SRP, Samoobrona Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej, Self-Defense of the Republic of Poland (political party, after 1989)

Stocznia Gdańska im. Lenina, Gdańsk Shipyard

Stocznia im. Adolfa Warskiego, Szczecin Shipyard

SW, Solidarność Walcząca, “Fighting Solidarity” (underground organization, 1980s)

Szczecin Shipyard. See Stocznia im. Adolfa Warskiego

SZSP, Socjalistyczny Związek Studemntów Polskich, Socialist Union of Polish Students (1973–1982)

TKK, Tymczasowa Komisja Koordynacyjna, Provisional Coordination Commission (underground “Solidarity” leadership, 1982–1989)

TKN, Towarzystwo Kursów Naukowych, Association for Scholarly Lectures (1978–1981)

TPD, Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Dzieci, Association of Children’s Friends

Tricity, Trójmiasto, metropolis of Gdańsk, Gdynia, and Sopot on the Baltic coast

TR “S,” Tymczasowa Rada “Solidarności,” “Solidarity” Provisional Council, 1986

Trybuna Ludu, official Party daily newspaper (1948–1990)

Tygodnik Mazowsze, largest underground paper (published weekly, 1982–1989)

Tygodnik Powszechny, liberal Catholic weekly published in Kraków (since 1945)

Tygodnik Solidarność, large-circulation weekly, the official journal of “Solidarity” published between April and December 1981, reactivated in 1989

UD, Unia Demokratyczna, Democratic Union (political party, after 1989)

UIL, Unione Italiana del Lavoro, Italian Labor Union

Uniwersytet Warszawski, Warsaw University

UOP, Urząd Ochrony Państwa, Office for the Protection of the State (after 1989)

UP, Unia Pracy, Labor Union (political party, after 1989)

URM, Urząd Rady Ministrów, Ministers’ Council Office

“Ursus,” tractor factory in the Ursus suburb of Warsaw

UW, Unia Wolności, Freedom Union (political party, after 1989)

Warski Shipyard. See Stocznia im. Adolfa Warskiego

WiN, Wolność i Niezawisłość, or Wolność i Niepodległość, Freedom and Independence (1945–1950s)

Wołów, Zakład Karny w Wołowie (penitentiary for recidivists in Wołów, Lower Silesia)

WRN, Wojewódzka Rada Narodowa, Voivodship Citizens’ Council, regional administrative body

WRON, Wojskowa Rada Ocalenia Narodowego, Military Council of National Salvation, or the “crow” (1981–1983)

WSK, Wytwórnia Sprętu Komunikacyjnego, transportation equipment factory in Rzeszów

“Wujek,” Kopalnia Węgla Kamiennego “Wujek,” coal mine in Katowice

WZZ, Wolne Związki Zawodowe, Free Trade Unions (1970s)

WZZ-GŚ, Wolne Związki Zawodowe Górnego Śląska, Free Trade Unions of Upper Silesia

WZZ-W, Wolne Związki Zawodowe Wybrzeża, Free Trade Unions of the Coast

Zaręba, penitentiary for first-time offenders and recidivists in Zaręba, Lower Silesia

Zagłębie Miedziowe, Copper Basin in Lower Silesia

ZHP, Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego, Polish Scouting and Guiding Association

ZLP, Związek Literatów Polskich, Union of Polish Writers

ZMP, Związek Młodzieży Polskiej, Union of Polish Youth (1948–1957)

ZMR, Związek Młodzieży Rewolucyjnej, Union of Revolutionary Youth (1956–1957)

ZMS, Związek Młodzieży Socjalistycznej, Union of Socialist Youth (1957–1976)

ZNP, Związek Nauczycielstwa Polskiego, the Polish Teachers' Union

ZOMO, Zmotoryzowane Odwody Milicji Obywatelskiej, Motorized Reserves of the Citizens' Militia (riot police)

ZPP, Związek Patriotów Polskich, Association of Polish Patriots (World War II)

ZRK, Zakłady Radiowe im. Marcina Kasprzaka, radio factory in Warsaw

ZSL, Zjednoczone Stronnictwo Ludowe, United People's Party (political party)

ZSMP, Związek Socjalistycznej Młodzieży Polskiej, Socialist Union of Polish Youth (1976–1990)

ZSP, Zrzeszenie Studentów Polskich, Polish Students' Union (1950–1973)

Żołnierz Wolności, daily newspaper of the Polish army (1943–1991)

From the Translator

We started translating this memoir in early 2017. The bulk of the work was completed still during Karol Modzelewski's lifetime. Karol was very interested in the project and provided comments, clarity, and a few corrections that undoubtedly improved the translation. He also helped critique the cover art that we commissioned from artist KrzysztOFF SKAin May. We are sorry that Karol's untimely death prevented him from seeing and enjoying the outcome.

This is an abridged version of the original. We mainly omitted content that discussed the intricacies of post-1989 Polish political life and events that were not necessary for furthering the understanding of the book, and would confuse the non-Polish reader.

We also decided to include a posthumously published interview with Karol that illuminates many personal details of his life that he did not include in his book. We omitted sections from the interview that repeated events mentioned in the main body of the book. We are grateful to Donata Subbotko for her kind permission to include the interview.

We would like to express deep gratitude to Karol Modzelewski's family, his widow Małgorzata Goetz, and his daughter and son, Ewa Modzelewska-Kossowska and Adam Modzelewski for their gracious permission to publish the translation, and permission to use the family photographs. We attempted to credit as many of the photographs as possible.

Thank you to Keith Hadley for his advice on mountaineering vocabulary, and to Tomasz Gleb for his help with the photographs. Thank you to KrzysztOFF SKAin May for creating the cover art that portrays Karol as the battered rider.

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Frank L. Vigoda is the collaborative pen name for the translating duo of Gwido Zlatkes and Ann Frenkel, who are jointly responsible for all the shortcomings of the translation. Both halves of the translator are mutually indebted to each other for devotion to the work, and love, and understanding.

Frank L. Vigoda
(Gwido Zlatkes and Ann Frenkel)
February 2021

Introduction

Irena Grudzińska Gross

In the Very Heart of History

The first thing you may be curious about the book you are holding in your hands is the intriguing title: Is the "battered rider" of the horse of history about to fall to the ground? Will we hear confessions of horrible sins? Nothing could be further from the truth. No crimes have been committed, the author is in control of the story, of his pen, of his past. The tone of the book is even, we see the "rider" secure in his saddle. His great narrative talent fascinates us. We ride with him at our ease.[1]

I believe that Karol Modzelewski chose this title because of the problem common to historians writing autobiographies: they feel a need to place a distance between their life and history. At every turning point of his life, Modzelewski seems to be more emotional about its historical context than about himself. Trained in the craft of the historian, he wanted to write a dispassionate version of the times he happened to be born and act in. The irony of the title, like an opening sound coming from a tuning fork, was to prevent a lachrymose reading of his war and prison experiences—he did not want to present himself as a victim. Though he had been, as Hannah Arendt would say, an actor and sufferer in the major movements and catastrophic events of the past eighty years, he is showing himself as a rational subject, though in difficult circumstances. He is no Sancho Panza or Don Quixote on a meager horse. Yet his life does resemble an adventure. He was born, so to say, in the very heart of history and, choosing history as his métier, he acted in it, thought about it, and wrote it. And because he lived with courage, thought with depth, and wrote with talent, the present book has nothing "battered" about it.

The author of the book—Karol Modzelewski—was born in Moscow in November 1937. He died in a Warsaw hospital on April 28, 2019, at the age of eighty-two. He left behind a legacy of several by now classic works of medieval history and a very distinguished life. He was an accomplished historian, frequent political prisoner, charismatic politician, and beloved teacher. But the beginnings of his life were not very promising. As he himself wrote (the historian speaking), Moscow in 1937 was not a good place and moment to be born. The Soviet Union was in the grip of one of its great catastrophes: the Great Terror. Approximately ten million people were imprisoned under false accusations, and at least one million perished, among them Karol's maternal grandfather. At his birth, Karol was named Kiril Budniewicz, taking his last name after his father, Aleksander Budniewicz (I am using Modzelewski's transcription from Russian, which Polonized his father's names). Karol's father too had been arrested and spent years in the Gulag, and his union with Natalia Wilder, Karol's mother, did not survive his imprisonment. When little Kiril was two years old, his Jewish-Russian mother married a Polish communist, Zygmunt Modzelewski, himself just released from a Soviet prison. Two years later the Russian-German War broke out, and both Natalia and Zygmunt went to fight. Four-year-old Kiril was placed in a children's orphanage. That stay turned him into a fierce patriot of his Soviet homeland. I found that part of his story truly fascinating.

In the description of his childhood he broaches the issue of patriotism in a very personal way. He returns frequently to his need of belonging, of being part of a group. Considering the rather reticent character of the rest of the book, the importance for the author of his formative influences seems very meaningful. He was looking for continuities in a life marked by change and displacements. He asks himself about the reasons for his transformation from a Russian patriot to a Polish one. What was stressed in his Soviet wartime upbringing, he wrote, was that an individual truly exists only as a part of a collective.

> Soviet education in general, and especially education in orphanages had a collective character. We were taught to consider the preponderance of the collective over the individual. This concerned not just the nation as a collective but also other groups—from a pioneer pack, to a troop, to a work team, to a military detachment, or to the Party (the sole one, and written with a capital P). . . . We believed that man exists in a collective, and outside of the collective loses humanity. . . . The effectiveness of such an upbringing has its

> roots not only, or even not as much in the pressure we were exposed to, but in the need to belong to a group which is natural to every person. During the war the national collective assumed the highest position in the hierarchy of collective values.
> What remains today of all of that? Quite a lot, even if my Russian identity gave in with time to the Polish national identity . (p. 9)

Indeed, after Zygmunt Modzelewski adopted his wife's son and gave him his last name, the family moved to Poland. It was 1945, and for Kiril it meant a new first name, a new alphabet, and a new culture. The transplant, so typical of the times of postwar massive migrations, was very successful. The nine-year-old Russian boy, now Karol Cyryl Modzelewski, quickly became a Pole. And he embraced this new identity with a passion. In the book his first-person pronoun is often replaced by "we," and the "we" always means "Poles." Here we can see his second real interest after history: politics. Both while writing history and doing politics, he has the Polish nation as the collective subject in mind. Well aware of this, he stated that "the [Polish] national bond is a very important reference axle in my life. Without it I would not be able to sensibly relate my experiences" (p. 31).

It is in this context that he decisively dismissed any importance of the fact that on his mother's side he came from a "Russified" Vilnius Jewish family. Identity is what is in one's head, not in the genes, he declared in the book. He rejected Sartre's idea that one's Jewish identity is defined from the outside, by the eye of the other—he himself would decide who he was. He enumerated several cases when he was publicly identified as a Jew, mostly by his political enemies. But he never accepted this denomination. It is a remarkable refusal or resilience for somebody so fitting the parameters of the anti-Semitic stereotype of "Judeo-communist." After all, he came to Poland from Soviet Russia, with communist parents who were active in implementing the new communist regime in postwar Poland. He himself became a member of the communist youth organization, and then the communist party of Poland; he remained, until the end of his life, a declared leftist. Yet his sense of being a Pole was strong and unwavering throughout his post-Russian life. I think this was one of the conditions that made his political career possible and convincing. One has to be a Pole in Polish politics.

His choice of total Polish allegiance had consequences not only in the way he acted but also in how he interpreted political events he was a part of. He dismissed as relatively unimportant the anti-Semitic actions of Polish authorities in 1968; what truly bothered him that year was the Polish participation in the Warsaw Pact military invasion of Czechoslovakia. He felt deep shame for the actions of *his* country as an invader, while he considered the expulsion of the remnants of the Polish Jews only as a result of sectarian politics. He was fiercely patriotic already in 1956 when, as a nineteen-year-old student, he took an active leadership stance in the "Polish October," an implicitly anti-Soviet movement to democratize the Polish communist system. Fierce patriotism in Poland is usually anti-Russian; in his case, his anti-Soviet attitude was mellowed by his empathy toward the Russian people.

Charismatic, handsome, and extremely intelligent, he was also a great orator, capturing his listeners in rally after rally in 1956. This part of the book is very arresting, showing not only the historical events but also his apprenticeship into mass politics. The book is full of such openings into history and personal explication of reasonings behind political decisions. Modzelewski's prodigious memory and clear thinking make out of this "riding of history" a very illuminating trip. But 1956 and 1968 may have been just a preparation for other historical dates in his life. I think especially about his role in the Solidarity movement of 1980–1981. In a famous poster produced during the time of Solidarity—an electrocardiogram with, at its peaks, consecutive dates of postwar Polish rebellions—Modzelewski's name can be attached to all of its points.

Yet each of these historical moments was followed, like an electrocardiogram's dips, by his returns to the life of a historian. When the "Polish October" revolt subsided, he went back to his studies, and in 1959 defended his doctoral thesis. He then went on an academic fellowship to Italy, where he studied medieval history and the Italian language. While there, he learned something new in politics: he had the occasion to observe the functioning of a multiparty system. This was one of the decisive influences on his political thinking; his Marxist worldview was softened by the appreciation of parliamentary democracy. But this transition took time. Unhappy with the results of the “October,” he joined with another young leader, Jacek Kuroń, in opposing the regime from the left. They titled their critique “An Open Letter to the Members of the Polish United Workers Party.” Poland, they wrote, instead of being ruled by its working class, was governed by the class of the new Party bureaucracy. The distribution of the “Letter” soon landed both of them in prison.

This was the first but not the last sentence that kept him imprisoned for longer than any other dissident in pre-1989 Poland—nine and a half years altogether. It was his and Jacek Kuroń’s dissident stand, rather than what they wrote, that radicalized the group of students I belonged to. Jacek, his close friend and coconspirator, was, like Karol, an assistant professor at Warsaw University at that time. They were a great pair of gurus: Karol a deliberate, articulate strategist; Jacek a fiery, visionary educator. We were inspired by their courage and by their hope that a change in the system was possible. It was the second half of the 1960s, and for us students the spirit of revolt was in the air. The until then dormant Czechoslovakia was stirring, and democratization seemed to be within reach. Karol and Jacek came out of prison just in time to lead the student movement in Poland, which erupted in March 1968. That too they paid for by returning to prison. But their “Open Letter” was read in the West, and when the student activist Daniel Cohn-Bendit was asked by a Parisian judge in May 1968 to identify himself, he replied that his name was “Kuroń-Modzelewski.”

During that imprisonment, his second, Karol went back to his study of history and, liberated in 1972, devoted himself to it full time. He was unusual in that way, able to move in and out of his dissident activities. He left Warsaw for Wrocław—a radical transfer in such a centralized country as Poland. This move allowed him to study and teach, and with time Wrocław became his city. While there, he was even able to publish his academic texts. But in August 1980, when momentous workers’ strikes erupted on the Baltic shore, he again suspended his academic work. This was his next encounter with history as an actor and sufferer. He participated in the founding of the Solidarity movement, to which he gave its name. The reader of this book will find fascinating description and analysis of the creation and development of this mass mobilization, and of its collapse. This part of the book often reads like a political thriller, though it offers descriptions that are psychological, historical, and documentary. And also literary: Karol's prodigious memory is here expressed in a direct and vivid language.

Modzelewski was for a time a spokesman for the Solidarity movement. His main political concern was, as throughout his previous activities, egalitarianism. He always felt close to the working class; he was tracing the roots of this affinity back to his Soviet upbringing. But the Solidarity movement became hierarchical with a group of highly placed advisors Karol did not see eye to eye with. His years spent outside of Warsaw also played a role. He was soon marginalized, though active in the regional bodies of the movement. That too he paid for: when the Solidarity movement was crushed in December 1981, he was again put in prison, to be liberated only two and a half years later. This stint is what made his prison record the longest on record.

The partially free elections of June 1989 marked the gradual implosion of the communist regime in Poland and in the region. Karol kept doggedly to his interest in history, but he was unable to stay away from the exhilarating spirit of change. He was elected to the new independent senate, and he collaborated with some left-wing parties. This egalitarian leftist sensibility put him out of step with the new eager capitalists. In that moment of regime change, egalitarian sensibility was considered hopelessly nostalgic. The political landscape of East-Central Europe was shape-shifting, and people were looking to Western Europe and the United States in search of models. Private property was to be a warranty of freedom, and inequality a necessary price to pay for the development of a market economy. Those who, like Karol, protested against the massive firings of industrial workers, the limiting of state welfare structures, and the marginalization of those unable to adapt to new economic conditions were not considered up to date.

Today, with the growth of populism in Europe, the victory of social nationalism in Poland, and the reign of Trump in the United States, the warnings of the old-fashioned European intellectuals should be given more hearing. And Karol Modzelewski was an old-fashioned European intellectual, divided between the life of mind and a call for active support of social justice. I am praising that way of being in the world and find it so convincing because, in some way, I learned it from Modzelewski himself.

This is why his writing about the roots of his thinking, the reasons for his political decisions, and the thoughts about their consequences are so important to me. And, I dare to say, may be important for any reader who is interested in Polish history, social movements, and intellectual engagement in the world. In 1989 important decisions were made. They need to be reevaluated in the light of their results.

After retreating from active politics (he was always present as a commentator), Karol had a very fruitful academic career. Two of his books were especially acclaimed—the study of the origins of European identity (*Barbarian Europe*, 2004) and the very political autobiography you are reading now. *Riding History to Death* was published in 2013 in Poland and a year later received two of the most prestigious Polish awards: a literary one (NIKE) and a historical one (the Moczarski prize). He was until 2014 deputy president of the Polish Academy of Science and the recipient of the highest Polish state distinction—the Order of White Eagle (1998)—as well as of the French Légion d'honneur (2016). The finish line was good.

Yet long, repetitive imprisonments wrought havoc on Karol's and Jacek's health. Both were sick later in their life. Jacek died in 2004, Karol fifteen years later. I was lucky to spend a few days with Karol and his wife, Małgorzata Goetz, in the spring of 2018, celebrating together the fiftieth anniversary of 1968 in the beautiful city of Turin. I remember discussing with them this autobiography, disputing his interpretation of the 1968 events, and listening to his speech in Italian to a large auditorium full of Italian sixty-eighters and young students. He spoke, as was his wont, without notes, in full paragraphs, and with a clear structure of the entire speech down to its conclusion. I was very moved, perhaps for sentimental reasons: I was again feeling young(er), listening to whom Italians would call my *capo storico*—my political leader. As always, he was speaking about himself as a part of a common subject—the Poles. Until the end, he remained the spokesman for Polish history, a history of egalitarian, open, welcoming Poland. A Poland that took in a Russian boy who went on to live there a remarkable, honorable life. When he died, he must have been at ease.

I am using the word "remarkable" on purpose. *Riding History to Death* is a remarkable book written by a remarkable man who lived a long and eventful life in a country (actually two countries) shaken by a series of historic upheavals. It is rare to find in one person such a talented writer, experienced politician, and astute historian. His life was long, so the ride through history takes many pages. But both his life and this book end too quickly.

NOTE

1. For the author’s explanation of the title, see the epilogue, **page [TBD]**.

Author's Note

> The whole earth is like a copper coin
> While somewhere in the sky
> Gods circle high above my head
> And in the enormous Book of Life
> They read my fate
> They slowly turn page after page
> In which I walk to and fro
> Blindly and merrily
> —Bulat Okudzhava, *My Gods*[1]

In this book I try to give an account of my life. Initially I wanted to call it *An Examination of My Experiences*, but the inevitable association with an examination of conscience would have been misleading. I am seventy-six, and I have quite a lot on my conscience. I feel guilty about those who are dearest to me, as well as some I do not know personally. Still, I am not good at public confession. Naturally I am aware of the key role of ethical choices in public and private life. But I avoid acts of contrition or moralizing. Readers will benefit better from an honest account of my experiences in public life combined with a grain of self-reflection rather than an apology. This is especially true of the heirs of my generation who will contest what we accomplished and overturn or fix what we got wrong. I will not lecture them (they would ignore me anyway), but I would like to provide some material for reflection.

I am a historian—a medievalist. I study ancient history and cultures. I try to understand, decipher, and translate them into categories that are comprehensible to our times. But I also have participated actively in history in the making. We all create history daily—most of the time we are unaware of it. Yet there are also revolutionary endeavors to influence the course of history in a deliberate way. I have participated in such endeavors in 1956, the 1960s, and particularly in the 1980s. Eventually we succeeded in "shifting the switch" of the history train, but the results turned out to be rather different than our, or at least my, aims and expectations. As many before us, we found ourselves like the sorcerer's apprentice.

My experiences were common to many people. I will describe them from my personal perspective. They cannot be understood without shedding light on my values and describing the childhood and adolescence that shaped my emotional attitude toward the world. My autobiography is different in that it covers only things that significantly influenced my public activities. Nonetheless, it must start like a biography—with my birth.

NOTE

1. Bulat Okudzhava (1924–1997) was a famous Soviet and Russian bard of Georgian-Armenian ancestry. His poetic songs, while never overtly political, were perceived as subversive toward the Soviet system. Translated from the Polish version by FLV.

Chapter 1

Children of the Homeland

SENTIMENTAL EDUCATION
AND NATIONAL COMMUNITY

> Nations, nations, why do you need nations
> That stand in the way of happiness and accord.
> You want peace? Get rid of obstacles!
> Nations, nations, nations . . .
> —Jacek Kaczmarski[1]

At the end of the 1990s I was invited to Central European University in Budapest to deliver a lecture on Europe's barbaric roots. At least a hundred young people showed up. The language of instruction was English. I do read English, but am not able to lecture in it; moreover, I never write down and read what I want to say to my audience. So I asked if anyone knew French, and less than twenty people responded. Italian? Another ten, at the most. Then I was struck by an idea, and I asked about Russian. A forest of hands went up. Most of the students came from Russia or post-Soviet countries. For some, Russian was their mother tongue, and for others it was their common language of the former empire.

After the lecture I went to dinner with a few professors. Among them was Anna Mikhailovna Kuznetsova, a fine Moscow-based medievalist. She was curious why I knew Russian so well. I proudly told her that I had been born in Moscow in 1937. She groaned, "Vot uzh nashli vy sebe gorod i god dlia togo chtob' roditsia!" ("Couldn't you have found a better year and place to be born!")

This was indeed a bad place and time. The years 1937 and 1938 were the peak of Stalinist terror. About a million people, most of them urban intelligentsia, were executed on the basis of summary sentences by the so-called NKVD troikas.[2] Most sentences were issued in absentia. The sentenced people did not even face the NKVD officers who sent them to death. At the end of 1938, Nikolai Yezhov, the People's Commissar for Internal Affairs who directed the massacre, was shot on the order of Stalin himself. After Yezhov’s death, the practice of expedited sentences in absentia and mass executions was suspended. In the spring of 1940 the summary executions soon resumed to include the murder of Polish officers from POW camps in Kozelsk, Starobilsk, and Ostashkov.[3] The officers were executed by firing squads in the same way as millions of their Soviet predecessors and buried in the same mass graves as the victims of the great 1937–1938 purge: in Katyń, Kharkiv, Mednoe, and Bykovnia.[4]

In addition to the one million executed during the two bloodiest years of the Great Terror, at least ten million people were arrested and sent to the Gulag. A large part, perhaps even a majority, died behind barbed wire. In my family, my maternal grandfather was arrested first. He was a mining engineer, superbly educated at the École des Mines in Paris. He was also a Menshevik, a friend of prominent activists of that Party so hated by the Bolsheviks. Therefore at the time of the “Great Purge” his sentence was inevitable. On December 9, 1937, when I was seventeen days old, Alexandr Budnyevich, my biological father and my mother’s first husband, was arrested. He was neither an opponent of the Bolsheviks nor an important person. He simply was a regular cadet in the Military Armored Forces Academy in Moscow. However, the mass repression that fell upon the officer corps of the Red Army after Marshal Tukhachevsky’s trial and execution reached all the way to the bottom. Alexandr Budnyevich received eight years in a camp. This was a standard sentence at the time, nothing extraordinary.

In any case, my father survived.[5] I met him twice, the first time in 1947. My mother took me from Warsaw to Moscow, and in a stranger’s apartment (only much later did I learn that the stranger was my cousin) she introduced me to a man wearing faded fatigues. She told me, “This is your father. Now you need to decide if you want to live in Russia with him, or go back to Poland with me.” All I remember is that I was so frightened I buried myself in her skirts.

I met my father again in January 1956. My stepfather had been dead for two years.[6] My mother took me with her when she went to the USSR as a scholar of Russian literature. This was already during the Thaw, and the next month Stalin was to be condemned at the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU.[7] My biological father came to Moscow from Bashkiria illegally (he was still barred from Moscow), but there was little risk that he would be punished. We walked around the town, took our picture together in a photo shop, and talked about the camps, the terror, and Stalin. I was eighteen years old, and these subjects weren't taboo for me anymore.

But earlier—before June 1954—I knew nothing of what had happened to my grandfather or father. Back in the USSR, when I became old enough to notice that other children had fathers, I asked about my father and was told that there was a war, and he was at the front fighting for the Soviet homeland. My mother wrote him letters and took the trans-Siberian train to visit him, but she did not tell him that she was already in a relationship with a Pole, Zygmunt Modzelewski.[8] In November 1945, three months before her first husband was released from the camp, she took me from Moscow to Warsaw.

In the Stalinist USSR the fate of my grandfather was predetermined, and the fate of my biological father also followed a standard pattern. But the fate of my stepfather Zygmunt Modzelewski was unusual. I considered him my true father because he raised me, and I believe he influenced me deeply. He came from Częstochowa. He was born in 1900 as the eighth child in the family of a railroad worker—straight from a socialist-realist textbook. Two of his older sisters, Apolonia and Stanisława (Stacha), stopped their education at the fourth grade. Auntie Pola barely could write or read, but she was active in the union in the Częstochowianka textile factory. In the 1930s she put a burlap bag on the director's head during a strike so that he would not recognize the workers wheeling him out through the factory gate in a wheelbarrow. But he noticed my aunt, and later told her privately, "Mrs. Borowik, I know you were the one who put that bag on me. If I were the pig you all think I am, I would have fired you. But I have a conscience, and I know you have eleven children."

Their father, Mr. Borowik, was a well-paid roofer, but he also was a drunkard, had bouts of obsessive jealousy, and beat my aunt. Eventually he used a razor blade—he cut the veins in her neck and tried to cut his own throat. Luckily his eldest daughter Honorata managed to wrestle the razor from him. He was sentenced to five years for attempted murder, and later my aunt told me proudly, "You see, Karol, I stood my ground, and I divorced him."

Aunt Pola did not get involved in the underground during the German occupation as she had to take care of the children. Together with Honorata she smuggled food into the Reich to sell on the black market (the border was near Częstochowa). Honorata was caught and sent to Auschwitz, from which she returned with her heart turned to ice.

Zygmunt Modzelewski maintained good relations with his family, and after the war he lovingly took care of Aunt Pola. However, because of his education he left the family circle. He was exceptionally gifted, and while in school he was on scholarship. As a son of a railroad worker, that is, a state employee, he was also likely exempt from tuition. He finished a business-oriented high school in Częstochowa and started studying law at Jagiellonian University.

According to my father's official biography, he joined the Social-Democratic Party of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL) in 1917, that is, a year before his final high school exams. His school certificate seems to support this claim. He came from a Catholic family, and he even was an altar boy. But his 1917 school report shows a lower grade for his overall conduct, but with an A in religion. A note explains, "disobedient towards the priest, stopped attending church." Kudos to the priest who gave him an A for knowledge but not for his diligence in practicing religion. It is not clear whether my father's parting with the church occurred because of his involvement in the clandestine party of the radical left or rather as a result of a worldview crisis so common in seventeen-year-olds. This is because soon after the unification of the SDKPiL and the Polish Socialist Party-Left into the Communist Workers' Party of Poland (December 1918), he left his studies and volunteered for the Polish Army to fight against the Bolsheviks. For a communist this was unheard of. My father managed to hide the fact practically from everyone. Luckily for him, the NKVD never learned about it, nor did his party or even my mother. Until recently I did not know it either.

A few years ago a Ms. Maria Wieczorek called me in Warsaw. She explained that she was a niece of my father's first girlfriend, Jadwiga Blum, who went with him to France in 1925. Jadwiga spent the war there and had preserved my father's personal papers. He fortunately did not take them when in 1937 he left Paris for Moscow after being ordered to go by the Party. When Ms. Wieczorek's aunt died, she acquired her personal effects, including my father’s papers. She told me I was welcome to see them or even take them.

Alongside his birth certificate, photographs, school reports, and Jagiellonian University records, I found two documents from 1921: a military discharge and a letter to the University signed by a Captain Czuma. The letter stated that “Master Corporal Zygmunt Modzelewski voluntarily served in the 24th Infantry Regiment of the Polish Army, and took an active part in repelling the Bolshevik invasion near Warsaw, and then fought on the Lithuanian-Belorussian front until the preliminary peace treaty. In December 1920, because of poor health, he was transferred to the 24th Infantry Regiment Support Battalion where he became an education specialist, and then a petty supply officer. He performed his duties exemplarily as a combat soldier, education specialist, and petty supply officer.” Captain Czuma expressed his hope “that society will appreciate that he fulfilled his obligations toward the homeland, and will provide him with all necessary help to continue his university studies.”

But our defender of the homeland, instead of finishing his studies, embarked on defending oppressed workers. I am not sure if he already was a communist before he went to war, possibly yes, but in the face of an invasion he acted on the patriotic impulse to defend the independence that had just been restored. In any case, his involvement in the Communist Party cannot be doubted after his discharge. In the meantime, his party became illegal because in 1920 it had declared itself on the side of the invader.

Zygmunt Modzelewski rapidly advanced in the communist underground. He became a “districter,” or head of the Party for the Śląsko-Dąbrowski district. He was active among the miners and organized strikes. He never said much about it, but after many years I felt his attachment to workers’ circles, despite his sparse words and rare displays of emotion. Besides, he himself came from such a background.

The “districter” Modzelewski was soon spotted by the police. He was arrested twice but managed to escape both times. The first time he escaped during a transfer. As a political prisoner he was not handcuffed in a crowded railroad station, and he outran his escort. The second time, as he once told me when in a good mood, he escaped via a tunnel. As a multiple recidivist in communist Poland, I feel embarrassed by the inefficiency of Poland’s interwar jailers. Still, as a runaway my father was wanted by the police, and his party decided to send him to France. He was to conduct Party work among the Polish workers, especially the miners in the Nord and Pas de Calais departments. My father crossed the border in disguise using the passport of Józef Fiszer, a glove maker from Bielsk and sympathizer of the Communist Party of Poland who was not listed in police records. My father took his personal documents with him to France, including his high school diploma. This allowed him to begin his studies in Paris and graduate from the prestigious École des Sciences Politiques.

By the mid-1930s my father held a relatively high position in the leadership of the French Communist Party—he was a member of its Central Committee and headed the Polish Section. In 1937, when Stalin was about to purge the KPP leadership and dissolve the Party itself as a part of the Great Purge, Modzelewski became a convenient target.[9] It was also possible that Stalin wanted to keep in check the leadership of the French Communist Party, even if its leader, Maurice Thorez, was unconditionally loyal. So the Communist International summoned Modzelewski to Moscow. He knew this was not a good sign, but because he was clean, he hoped that they would just question and release him. But he was arrested soon after he arrived in the USSR in October 1937.

At Lubyanka prison he received “special treatment.” Unlike my biological father, Modzelewski got more than a few punches in the mouth, twenty-hours’ forced standing, and eight years in the lager—he was selected for a show trial to confess his worst offenses and inform on his codefendants. An accused who was assigned such a role had to be adequately prepared. But he was stubborn. He was beaten, deprived of sleep, held in an ice-cold solitary cell—all for nothing. He denied that he was ever an agent of the French or Japanese intelligence, both of which they tried to attribute to him. He was brazen and talked back to the investigator who called him an old agent-provocateur, “No, you are the agent-provocateur!”—even if he knew this would get him extra beatings.

Because of his obstinacy, he lost his health but saved his life and freedom. He outlasted Yezhov, and in July 1939, a half year after Yezhov’s fall, Modzelewski was released from prison during the so-called “beriovskaia peredyshka” [Beria’s break]—which was how Russians mockingly termed the relaxation of terror during the initial period of Lavrentiy Beria as the NKVD head. During that time many of the accused who had not confessed their guilt were released, and their imprisonment could be presented as an example of the perverse wrongdoings of Yezhov who turned out to be a hidden enemy of the people. My father was cleared of his accusations and given back his French Communist Party card (in the meantime the KPP had been disbanded).[10] Yet my father did not join the Soviet Party and did not file for Soviet citizenship—without any repercussions. But he needed help, because during the first weeks after his release he was not able to hold a spoon by himself.

The Polish communists who were in Moscow (that is, those who were not in prison) found him a place with my mother. She was a cousin of the imprisoned KPP activist Juliusz Majski’s wife, and through her my mother knew a group of Poles in Moscow. My mother was also a “grass widow” of an imprisoned Red Army cadet and lived in decent conditions by the standards of that time. We occupied the largest of five rooms in a bourgeois apartment converted to a “communal quarter” for five families. Only my mother, myself, and my grandmother lived in our spacious room (my father and grandfather were already in the camps). Aunt Lola and her husband, Mikołaj (later it came out that he was an NKVD informer), were tucked in a nook behind a curtain, and Ekaterina (Katya) Feduseyeva, a peasant from near Tambor, lived by the entrance door behind a cardboard screen. Katya had joined our family as Mr. Wilter’s (that is, my grandfather’s) housekeeper after some family disaster, or perhaps after the collectivization. She was also my nanny. I loved her with a great and wholly reciprocated love.

Modzelewski entered this household exhausted from prison. My mother brought him back to life, spoon fed him, and things developed from there. Initially I called him “dyadya Zyg” (Uncle Zygmunt) as nobody told me that he would become my father. But then the war broke out (for the Soviet people this happened on June 22, 1941) and the Union of Polish Patriots was established in Moscow.[11] Modzelewski, who played an important role in this, declared that I would become his son. In November, when the Germans were approaching Moscow, my parents were included in the planned evacuation and sent to the town of Engels, and I was sent to the “Woodland Spa” orphanage, one thousand kilometers east of Moscow. This orphanage was assigned to the Comintern, and it housed children of communist immigrants who were at large and treated as foreign comrades, not as enemies of the people. For that reason we were provided with very decent food for wartime. It was like a peacetime cafeteria. I didn’t go hungry, unlike my parents in Engels. I should mention that Katya did not go with them but followed me to the orphanage where she found employment as kitchen help, so I had somebody to cuddle with among the strangers.

I was four at the end of 1941 when I was taken to the orphanage. I remember almost nothing of those early years, only a few disconnected scenes. In the “Woodland Spa,” together with other children my age, I was subjected to the molding of new generations according to patterns developed by the Soviet state. This sounds horrible, but my memories are not bad. First of all the Russian national identity was being instilled in our minds. That was usual. Especially during the war, the official education of Soviet children was marked by pan-Russian nationalism, despite the multinational character of the Imperium. The Soviet Union and Mother Russia blended into the homeland in deadly peril and heroically fighting. We—prospective soldiers, nurses, and builders—were the future pride and hope of the Great Russia. Curiously, this was conducted under the patronage of the Communist International.

I do not think that our teachers (exclusively women) wanted to uproot these children of foreigners who had come to the USSR from many places in Europe and around the world. Besides, we did not need to be remodeled into little Russians. Most of us came from mixed families—with an international communist father and a Russian mother. Such was my first “fiancée,” Lucetta Negarville, and I as well. We were both five when our mothers came to visit us in the “Woodland Spa.” This required at least a weeklong trip in a primitive train, after which both the exhausted parents and their children were assigned for a few days to a two-room cabin with a small kitchenette. We got one of these cabins, and our love blossomed as we played. Our mothers talked to each other in Russian, and so did we. Lucetta was Lusha, and I was Kiriusha (a diminutive of Kiril, my given name from birth until 1947). In 1994 after I gave a lecture in Rome, a handsome Italian lady approached me. She introduced herself as Lucetta Negarville and said that we had known each other a long time ago. When she saw that I was confused, she suddenly switched to flawless Russian, “Kiriusha, ty menya ne uznayosh? Ya Lusha!” (“Kiriusha, don’t you recognize me? I am Lusha!”) I was in total shock. My first fiancée was a daughter of one of the historic leaders of the Communist Party in Italy.[12]

Before coming to the orphanage I did not know about any languages other than Russian, nor did I understand that there was a Russian nation. The notion of a nation manifests as the distinction between one’s own people and other people—otherwise it is not tangible. For a very small child such a thing is difficult to imagine if not directly experienced. I probably noticed that “Uncle Zygmunt”—that is, my father—had a strange accent, but he used the same words as everybody else. Surely it must have been mentioned at home that he was Polish, but I do not remember because at the time it meant nothing to me.

My sense of Russian identity was developed in the “Woodland Spa” based on the clear juxtaposition of us (the Russians) and the enemy (the Germans). The greatest virtue was war heroism in the struggle against an enemy. Our hero was a soldier named Alexander Matrosov, who with his own chest blocked the embrasure in a German bunker with a machine gun. Bullets pierced his body, but the Germans were not able to shoot at the attacking Red Army soldiers, which enabled them to capture the fortification. We wanted to be like Matrosov or like Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya—another fallen hero from the same collection of iconic figures for little children.[13] This directive of heroism, cult of the victim, and contempt for death, acquired as part of the collectivist education in wartime, can change color because the sense of national identity can change (which happened to me), but the palette of emotions developed in childhood remain.

For us, children in a Soviet orphanage, a German was a symbol of danger that must be destroyed. Yet this was a faceless abstraction. The front was far away. But one spring or autumn day during a walk (I remember we wore appropriate coats for the season) we encountered these enemies in person. On a dirt road a column of German POWs was moving toward some destination in Siberia. They were led by a Soviet soldier armed with a hand-loaded rifle with a long bayonet. The Germans walked very slowly, barely dragging their legs. Some used rags tied up with string instead of shoes. They wore odd tattered rags, and many had wool scarves, apparently given to them by peasant women out of pity. The boys in my group knew they could not take pity on the enemy. The prisoners were showered with insults and then with stones. The pebbles thrown by the children could not do much harm, and our teacher did not react. The guard shouted lazily at us to stop, and I stood as if paralyzed. I remember vividly my terrible sense of uncertainty—must I throw a stone too, like a real Russian and a real man?

Perhaps I remembered that my mother always told me not to hit those who are weaker. These enemies were not powerful or dangerous. They looked like the dregs of human misery, powerless before their guard armed with an old-fashioned rifle and a group of small children. But my passivity was not a result of an ethical choice or proud refusal to participate in something wrong. It reflected my inability to decide, something I was terribly ashamed of. That burning shame allows me to vividly remember that event and preserve its lesson.

This is not to say that I did not give in to the pan-Russian indoctrination to which we were subjected in the orphanage. To the contrary, I digested it and carried it deep in my heart. In 1943 my stepfather was promoted to captain (a lighting-speed advancement from platoon leader) and organized the 1st Division of the Polish People's Army in Siedlce.[14] He took my mother with him. He did not manage to secure an officer's rank for her, but she became a war correspondent. So when she returned to the "Woodland Spa," she wore a Polish uniform and a holster at her belt. I boasted that my mother wore a uniform and had a gun but also felt ashamed because her uniform was strange. The overcoat was not gray-brown like the Soviet Army but green. The buttons were not gold but also green. On the buttons and hat there was a bird instead of a star, and I desired this five-pointed star (red on the hat and gold on the buttons) as a symbol of my identity. I did not admit it, but when my mother asked if I wanted a present, I eagerly answered, "ya chinel' khochu" ("I want a military overcoat"). "Like the one I have?" she wanted to be sure. "No, I want a real one.” She must have understood because she sewed me a little Red Army uniform before she left.

The next day the children from my group swarmed around me like flies. Everyone wanted to have a golden button with a five-pointed star. I fought the crowd but ended up losing my insignia. In the evening the teacher stitched hideous black buttons on my overcoat so I that could close it—as if it was an ordinary civilian coat. Humiliated, I cried all night. Even today I do not see the words of Marshal Rydz-Śmigły, “We won’t surrender a single button from our uniforms,” as ridiculous.[15] To me, they mean something profound.

All Soviet education, and especially education in orphanages, had a collective character. We were taught about the preponderance of the collective over the individual. This concerned not just the nation but also other groups—a pioneer pack, a troop, a work team, a military detachment, or the Party (the sole one, and written with a capital P). In the “Woodland Spa,” boys twelve and older underwent military exercises (we envied them) and compulsory practice in production units to instill habits of teamwork. Physical work had a cultlike status, almost like war. We believed that man exists in a collective, and outside of the collective he loses humanity. We did not use or even know such words, but that was how we felt. The effectiveness of such an upbringing has its roots not only or even not as much in the pressure we were exposed to but in the need to belong to a group that is natural to every person. During the war the national collective assumed the highest position in the hierarchy of collective values.

What remains today of all of this? Quite a lot, even if my Russian identity gave in to the Polish national identity.

At the beginning of 1944 I returned to Moscow. “Uncle Zygmunt” now wore the uniform of a Polish Army captain. I was supposed to call him “dad,” but I learned this very slowly. Besides, “dyadya Zyg” who became my father was seldom home. With the staff of the 1st Army he went to the front and then to Lublin from where he returned to Moscow in a civilian suit as the first ambassador of the People’s Republic of Poland.

We moved from a room in a “komunalnaya kvartira” (communal apartment) to a mansion on Tolstoy Street where the Polish embassy was located. There I saw many men in uniforms similar to those that my parents had worn recently. I already knew they were allies’ uniforms, still they weren’t “real,” that is, Soviet uniforms. When the trade attaché, Adam Zausznica, who was good with his hands, asked me if I would like to have a medal, I did not ask for the Polish Cross of the Brave but for the Soviet Medal for Bravery. Mr. Zausznica drilled a hole in a copper 20 kopeck coin, added an appropriate pin, and pinned it on my chest. I wore that trinket with pride, and I remember Mr. Zausznica fondly.

Moving to the embassy meant a change of environment. The diplomatic personnel were Poles and spoke Polish. For some time my mother tried to teach me that language—which was foreign to both of us. The children of the embassy’s employees spoke Russian with each other and with me, but they knew Polish and considered themselves Poles. I stubbornly kept repeating that I was not Polish but Russian, and I fiercely defended my childhood identity.

The deepest wound I suffered was inflicted by a son of an embassy clerk. Of course we talked in Russian and were buddies, but to my declaration that I was a Russian, he calmly responded, “Nyet, ty ne russkii, ty evrei” (“You’re not a Russian, you’re a Jew”). He probably was referring to my mother whose maiden name was Wilter (which I knew) and who indeed was from a Russified family of Vilna Jews (something I did not know), or maybe he was repeating the rumor that Zygmunt Modzelewski’s real name was Józef Fiszer, and he was not a Pole but a Jew. Perhaps my friend did not mean anything bad, perhaps he himself was a son of a Polish communist with Jewish roots and was trying to let me know that I was like him. But I did not know the word “Jew,” or I did not know its meaning. All I understood was this was some stigma that excluded me from my (that is, Russian) community. Marked with this alien, incomprehensible stigma, I would be deprived of my Russian identity. I could not accept this.

I went to my mother and asked her what that word meant. She began by saying that she herself was a Jew, like my grandmother and grandfather who were already dead. Jews were nothing bad, simply a nationality, the same as the Russians, and I did not need to worry because it was possible to be one and the other at the same time—they did not exclude one another. I tried to accept this, but somehow it did not go down well. I did not think that one nationality was as good as another. It did not occur to me that one can be one and the other at the same time, for instance, a Russian and a Pole, or even less a Russian and the mysterious Jew I knew nothing about. Besides, my neighborhood friend was unambiguously clear—I could not be a Russian if he had classified me as a Jew. This was a mark of exclusion. That label was to cut me off from the roots I considered my own. That needed to be rejected. And this is how it stays with me until now.

Poland is considered an anti-Semitic country, but only a few times in my long life has someone reproached me for my Jewish ancestry. This was done mainly, if not exclusively, by the people serving the authorities—the contributors to the gutter propaganda of March 1968: Major Bogal of the MSW Bureau of Investigations who interrogated me in prison then, the state prosecutor Leszek Pietrasiński in court in January 1969, and a discussant implanted by the secret police at a pre-election meeting in May 1989. Unfortunately Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz was also on this list, although I wish I would not have to include him.[16]

These people usually preferred to use allusions rather than speak directly. Major Bogal was so delicate that he made no allusions to me, just to my acquaintances: “Aleksander Perski, what a strange name.[17] Where is Persia? Isn’t it in the Middle East?” Prosecutor Pietrasiński, better known for his later appearance at the trial of the murderers of Father Popiełuszko in Toruń, where instead of the murderers he fiercely blamed their victim, was clear: “All the accused with the sole exception of Jacek Kuroń are of Jewish extraction, and this was proved beyond a doubt during the investigation.”[18]

In such cases I was angry, but I did not feel obliged to accept the stigma of exclusion and all its racist ramifications with pride and dignity. To the contrary, I felt I was forced into a mold. I responded to Prosecutor Pietrasiński in my last words that were published soon afterward in the Paris-based *Kultura* and quoted in free Poland many times.[19] I would never direct such words to my Jewish friends, and I really do not know how to respond when they bring up the same subject without offending them.

The thing is that I hear similar remarks in a warm and inviting tone much more often than anti-Semitic allusions. Sometimes my friends, sometimes my acquaintances, and sometimes strangers will grab me gently by the arm, look me in the eyes, and let me know—you are one of us, and we invite you to join our community. The element that links this community is supposedly the same thing that Bogal and Pietrasiński considered when excluding me from Polishness.

Dear friends, acquaintances, and strangers—do not be angry with me, but I cannot accept your invitation. I really like you (even if not all equally) and I feel good among you, but I will not join the circle of ethnic initiation. The sense of national identity is not inscribed in the genes but in the head. Surely it is not just socially relevant what one considers oneself but also how others regard one. From this, however, it does not follow that we must obediently adopt superstitions and stereotypes according to which someone else classifies and evaluates us.

The Jewish question in Poland is too important a matter to reduce my remarks to personal memories. Here is a more general comment, despite the fact that I do not deal professionally with Polish-Jewish relations but am merely a dabbler. Still, I am conscious of the principles of my profession. I know that a well-grounded academic knowledge multiplies questions and doubts rather than solves them, hence I am especially cautious.

I will begin with some relatively obvious observations regarding linguistic categories and habits. Many Poles have foreign names. These are inherited from more or less distant ancestors, but usually we do not draw conclusions from them about a person's national identity. Undoubtedly Aleksander Brückner had some German, or rather Austrian, ancestors, but nobody claims he was German or Austrian.[20] We know that he was a Pole and a great Polish scholar. No one would say that Ryszard Reiff was German either.[21] He was a Home Army soldier during the war, then a prisoner of the NKVD who managed to escape on foot from Siberia all the way back to Poland. Then he became a PAX activist and chairman and the only member of the Polish People's Republic's Council of State who did not vote for the introduction of martial law. In 1989 he became a senator from the

Solidarity Citizens' Committees. Regardless of his complicated history, he was a true Polish patriot. By the same token, no one considers Jadwiga Staniszkis a Lithuanian or Robert Szeremetiew a Russian.[22]

But we call Seweryn Blumsztajn a Jew.[23] We say this because he had Jewish ancestors, like Reiff had German ancestors, Staniszkis Lithuanian ancestors, and Szeremietiew Russian ones. The difference is that they naturalized, thus they are Poles, whereas Blumsztajn is still seen as a Jew. Because his name is Jewish. At the most we give political correctness a nod and call him a Pole of Jewish descent. But this does not change much. We do not call Szeremietiew a Pole of Russian origin. Evidently there is some indelible difference between them.

It would be too simple and unjust to say that the notion of a Jew in the Polish language and culture is based on a racial determinant like in the Nuremberg Laws or in the piercing eyes of the Polish schmaltzovniks who during the German occupation cleverly recognized, blackmailed, and delivered their Jewish cocitizens into the hands of the Gestapo. Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz and Zofia Kossak-Szczucka distinguished Jews from Poles by the same criteria, but they thought quite differently than the schmaltzovniks and did not hesitate to risk their own lives and the lives of their families in order to save Jews from the holocaust.[24] The indelible distinction between a Pole and a Jew could have strengthened under the influence of racism, but it is not derived from racism because it is much older than racism.

The Jews as well as the Germans have settled in Poland since medieval times. Both groups were under special care of the rulers and received special legal statuses that distinguished and separated their communities, which were organized according to their own rules from the Polish population. This was neither discrimination nor exclusion but a privilege to which the newcomer strangers were entitled by the principle described in positivist historiography as the principle of "the personality of laws." This rule sprang from an archaic, sacred principle that obliged the community to offer a "guest" arriving from a distant country personal safety (peace, or "mir"), a roof, and a meal.

But the Jews, unlike the Germans, were different in their religion. With the passing of time, this difference became more and more relevant under the influence of the Church. Christianity at its beginning parted with Judaism, thus it had to strongly emphasize the differences. In addition, priests portrayed the Jews as the murderers of Christ. With the growing influence of the Church this stereotype strengthened as the networks of parishes developed.

In modern times Poland became a country of Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants; as Christians they were separated from the Jews by an invisible barrier. Marriages between Christians of different denominations were possible, whereas between Jews and Christians they were not. Crafts and trade guilds and brotherhoods in towns had religious as well as economic functions. Jews remained outside of them, which infringed on their corporate monopoly. This was a long-lasting source of conflict. The requirement to belong to a guild was an active law in Poland as late as the end of the eighteenth century.

The walls that separated the Jewish community from all other communities were erected on both sides, and they grew. Finally they took the shape of segregation applied to every aspect of life. I cannot say what the origins of the rigorous exclusivism of Jewish *kehilot* were. They were already discernible by the counterreformation, sporadically contested during the Enlightenment, and then in the nineteenth century they were increasingly broken down by social mobility. I do not subscribe to the view that barricading themselves inside religious tradition and isolating themselves socially and culturally within ghettos were the Jew's heroic self-defense against losing national identity after having lost their ancient homeland. This idea bears the marks of an ahistorical stereotype. In my opinion the belief in the uniqueness of the Jews among all nations does not befit a historian. The concept of a chosen nation is not unique. It is found in the mythologies of various Indo-European tribes. The Lombards were adopted by Wotan, therefore they wore long beards like him. The Slavic Rani shaved their heads to look like the figure of Svetovid whom they apparently believed to be their ancestor. The twin deities cut the hair of the founder of the ruling Piast dynasty and gave him the name Siemowit, thus adopting him and his whole dynasty and, through the dynasty, the whole Polanie tribe. By no means are we worse than the Jews—we are just the locals.

In the nineteenth century, when modern educational systems and the birth of the intelligentsia opened new venues of social advancement, more and more Jews tried to seize opportunity. They exposed themselves not only to ostracism by their home communities that they were leaving but also to growing obstacles from the Polish communities with whom they were trying to blend. At that time the European nations were assuming their modern forms, and nationalisms were born. In Poland, and especially in the Russian partition, bloodied by the 1830 and 1863 insurrections and subjected to a brutal Russification, the national resistance against Orthodox Tsarism assumed Catholic forms. The stereotype of a Polish-Catholic emerged, and it was quickly adopted by the ideologues of the National Democracy.[25] All of this strengthened the barriers between the Poles and the Jews and hindered assimilation. The supposedly obvious (and thus profound) difference between the perception of Szeremietiew's and Blumsztajn's national identities has been shaped by a long and complex history.

Not until the twentieth century was this difference determined by racial prejudice—but rather by social-cultural distinctiveness. But still we do not get an easy pass on this. The religious-cultural segregation had such a structure that it was easy to superimpose the conceptual network of racism on it. Perhaps this did not need to happen, but it could, and in fact it did. The preconditions for this occurrence existed not only in Poland but also in other European countries including Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, Russia, Germany, and Austria. Finally Hitlerism emerged in Germany, and the Nazi order was imposed on us by the invader. The claim that the largest extermination camps were placed in Poland because the Nazis saw an ally in Polish anti-Semitism is simply an anti-Polish stereotype. To the Germans, the state of mind of the occupied Poles did not count at all. They budgeted for transportation and logistical convenience. An economic calculation prompted them to shuttle people to the gas in locations in Europe with the largest population of Jews.

But the fact that people were mass murdered like insects with Zyklon-B in our country requires us to take extra caution and preserve the memory. In the Holocaust burial ground it is not appropriate to remain thoughtlessly within the inherited framework of religious and cultural segregation of Poles and Jews. We should know this is not an innocent game.

This inheritance of separation has a long history. It will not easily give in to rational arguments, especially because communism and the People's Republic of Poland poured even more oil on the flame. It needs much understanding and patient work, like that required of a sapper. Toxic stereotypes must be disarmed one step at a time so that they will not tear apart social ties (including national ties) between the Poles.

In conclusion I will write a few words about my friend Seweryn Blumsztajn whose name I used as an example without asking permission. In March 1968 he was arrested, and in December of that year he was sentenced to two years in prison for his participation in the "March events." He was released by amnesty in July 1969. After he left prison, he had to face an exceptionally difficult trial. In the midst of the anti-Semitic witch hunt, his entire family left Poland. Seweryn was left completely alone—with no parents or relatives, no place to live, no income, no right to resume his studies at Warsaw University, and no life prospects. The government of communist Poland made clear that he had only one route open—to accept a so-called travel document or an emigration passport to Israel. Then he could go to any Western country, but he could not return to Poland, whose citizenship he would have to renounce. However, he chose to stay in Poland.

Martial law caught Blumsztajn in Paris. He had gone there for what was supposed to be a short visit, but December 13 happened, and Seweryn became one of the principal activists in the Paris bureau of the outlawed Solidarity. In January 1985 he decided to return to Poland. He had his Polish passport that allowed him to return. He expected to be arrested. Indeed, the secret service were waiting for him at the Warsaw airport—yet he was not arrested but instead deported. The agents put him on a plane and sent him back to Paris. This was blatantly illegal because he was a Polish citizen, but much worse things were being done at that time. He finally returned to Poland in August 1989.

In 1967 or 1968 at a meeting with student activists at Warsaw University, one of the secretaries of the Central Committee of the Union of Polish Youth named Hasiak declared, "Neither a Blumsztajn nor any other Sztajn can teach us about patriotism." Too bad. Seweryn Blumsztajn's

Polish patriotism successfully survived the most difficult tribulations. His experiences would surely provide valuable lessons for both comrade Hasiak and the other PZPR hatemongers of March 1968, as well as the activists of today's nationalistic right who think similarly.[26]

Between September 1944 and November 1945 I attended a school in Moscow near our "komunalnaia kvartira" (communal apartment). I finished the first grade and started the second. My classmates were Russians—an effective barrier against my initial impulse to Polonize. The slow and sometimes painful change in my sense of national identity started for good after my arrival in Poland.

When I came to Warsaw, I became part of a group of children from Russia who attended classes held in a private apartment in order to prepare them for study in Polish schools. After the summer break I was enrolled in Elementary School 191 on Narbutta Street. I went directly into the fourth grade because my Polish was good. In fact, I could even manage Polish orthography—I knew that wherever in Russian there is an "r," in Polish it must be "rz" and not "z" with a dot above, and wherever Russians write "o," in Polish it must be "ó" and not "u." But mathematics was my downfall, and alas, that has not changed.

This school differed vastly from the Soviet one. Every day we formed a long line in the corridor for prayers. In Moscow I had been only once in an Orthodox church. Katya took me there in secret, so my parents would not know. I remember the dim light, the floating candlelight, the incense, and the beautiful choral singing. All of this was very mysterious and solemn. The communal prayers in the Narbutta Street school were neither mysterious nor solemn. The children (who were Catholic) horsed around and giggled. I was timidly learning that official religious celebrations could be treated with a grain of salt. As a son of the communist foreign vice minister, I was not required to attend the religion lessons, but I wanted to be with the other children. Besides, I liked the woman who taught religion.

In these first postwar years the school had not yet turned communist—at least not the one I attended. A portrait of Marshal Piłsudski still hung in the schoolmistress's office. During music lessons we learned the hymn *My chcemy Boga* ("We want God"). My classmates' parents still complained at home about the authorities, and the kids repeated their complaints at school. In the USSR only once did I hear my grandmother call Stalin *etot izverg* (that monster), and I was very scared. In 1945–1947 Poland I often heard biting remarks about the communists, perhaps not as direct, but still unambiguous.

My parents were supportive of me growing into the new environment. My adult (and very tactful) guide into Polishness was of course my father, but neither of my parents wanted me to feel alienated. A friend even convinced my mother to change my first name, because Cyryl was associated with Eastern Orthodoxy. Thus I became Karol, while Cyryl was left as my second name. In fact this was just a magical act with no major practical consequences. But the choice of elementary school was important, as well as my summer camp in Władysławowo—this was because children rather than adults made up the environment.

Of course the war played a major role in games with my peers, just like at the "Woodland Spa." However this was a different war. The Germans were still the enemy, hated the same or even worse, but we were not Red Army soldiers anymore but Poles—Warsaw insurgents or the soldiers at Monte Cassino.[27] And unlike the Red Armists, our Monte Cassino soldiers also sometimes fell, because this was the martyrdom convention of Polish patriotism, as well as the text of the song.[28] My mother saved one of my drawings from that period showing some soldiers attacking a cloister on the top of a hill. My caption explains that some of the soldiers fell, and it contains a linguistic mistake characteristic of a newcomer from Russia, *niejeden z nich dostał i pał*.[29]

In conversations and games with my peers I also sensed that even if the Germans were our enemy, the soldiers with the red stars on their caps were not necessarily our allies. A prewar children's book that fell into my hands during a vacation in Lower Silesia and that I almost read to death pointed out that the Red Army once had been an invader of Poland. The hero of the book was a teddy bear from Lviv who went to the front in a soldier's knapsack to defend the fatherland against the Bolsheviks. At that time I had no idea that in 1920 my father had done the same thing. But shortly afterward I encountered something almost as disturbing.

I believe it was in April 1950 when I went with my mother to Zakopane. We stayed at the Lwowianka pension in Bystre where the families of politicians and well-known writers vacationed. On the very first day when we went to the dining room to have a late dinner, a short man approached my mother, kissed her hand courteously, and then turned to me.

“I am Władysław Broniewski,” he said.[30] “You have heard of me, haven’t you?”

I was taught to tell the truth, and I answered politely,

“No, sir.”

“Really—don’t you know my poems?”

“No, sir.”

The old gentlemen did not let it go.

“Well, how should I put it, I am a kind of Polish Mayakovsky.”

I looked at him with great admiration. Broniewski could not have hit a more sensitive spot. I loved Mayakovsky, and I knew his poems by heart. After a while he asked my mother if he could take me for a walk. My mother agreed with a forced smile. Before I put on my coat, she told me that Mr. Broniewski was not well, and under no circumstances should we go into the mountains, otherwise something could happen to him.

However, first we went down to the Circle. There was a coach drivers’ bar there called “Fortify Yourself.” Broniewski left me at the curb and went in to fortify himself. After a time he came back a little merrier. At the coach stand next to the bar we took a coach and went to Kuźnice. There the poet asked me to wait for him, and he disappeared into a cheap restaurant, this time for longer. When he reappeared, he told the cabbie to wait, waved toward Mount Nosal, and declared that we were going up there. I immediately protested.

“My mother told me we should not go into the mountains because it’s dangerous.”

Broniewski laughed, “An old woman of eighty could climb that mountain!”

My pride told me to take up the challenge. We started climbing up a snowy forest path. From what I know now, this was the end of the ski trail from Gąsienicowa Meadow. Luckily nobody skied into us.

Panting, we reached Obłaz Pass. We stopped to rest, took in the view, and Broniewski confessed to me that the mountains possessed an extraordinary magic, and man could feel like an eagle in the sky. Then we started to descend. The mountain air was apparently not good for him, because he started to stagger. At some point he pointed to the piles of felled wood covered with snow and declared that they were the graves of people who had been killed. I immediately positioned myself between him and a fascine fence on the edge of the trail so that he would not fall between these supposed graves. But we returned safely to Kuźnice, where Broniewski put me in the coach and again went into the restaurant.

Finally he came out with visible difficulty and climbed into the coach, and we trotted toward Lwowianka. Broniewski became pensive and after a moment confessed that his life had been very difficult.

"Kid, when I was in the war against the Bolsheviks, all the soldiers from my platoon died, my comrades-in-arms, my closest friends. The Bolsheviks killed them all. I was the only one who survived."

I froze. The news that the Polish Mayakovsky fought against the Bolsheviks hit me like a thunderclap. Broniewski fell silent for a moment, then he carefully looked at me with a shade of anxiety in his eyes, and said, "I have to tell you a secret, something that nobody knows. I, Władysław Broniewski"—he was pausing between every word—"a great revolutionary poet and true communist"—he stressed—"am a little bit drunk. But only a little."

After this he fell asleep, and then nearly fell off the coach.

I grabbed him by his lapels and pulled him inside. He woke up and gave me a lengthy look. I wasn't thirteen yet, I had a clean face, and the hood of my windbreaker was covering my head.

"I think we don't know each other yet, madam," my hero declared.

He slipped his hand under my windbreaker, seeking my breasts.

"But I am not a madam!" I cried, a little scared.

"That's right, you're a brat," Broniewski remembered and immediately fell asleep again.

Finally we arrived. Broniewski handed the cabbie a handful of bank notes. Somehow I dragged him up to the third floor, opened the door that he pointed out to me, and led him to a metal bed. The poet stood by the bed and swayed, so I pushed him until he fell onto the mattress. I felt awful pangs of conscience. I ran up to my mother. To my surprise, instead of sharing my despair, she started laughing. Confused, I asked why she was laughing.

“Because it is so funny,” she answered simply.

I cried disconsolately, “But Mommy, he is the Polish Mayakovsky!”

Between 1948 and 1949 Moscow decided to align the satellite countries of Eastern Europe to its own pattern. Model Stalinism started in Poland. Today that time is presented in solid black in textbooks, political journalism, and even in serious historical literature. This is not conducive to the understanding of that social reality. Still, both the public and the private lives of the Poles were indeed overshadowed by ubiquitous fear. In fact the terror was fierce even earlier, especially during the first postwar years when the communist authorities waged a bloody campaign against the anticommunist underground. The number of issued and executed death sentences in political cases was higher than in the first half of the 1950s. The results of the 1946 referendum and the 1947 parliamentary election were fabricated. Still, these were pluralistic elections in which the citizens voted not by order but by their own will. A legal opposition existed, and so did noncommunist newspapers. People were not afraid to express their true views in private conversations. But all of this changed. Polyphony was replaced by choral monody. Fear dictated not only words and gestures but also thoughts and feelings. The spiritual life of the society looked like an ice-bound river. Something was still going on under that shell, but there was no tangible life on the surface. Only when the ice started to break with the upcoming Thaw and the revolutionary year of 1956 arrived did it become apparent what significant changes had occurred during that dead time.

Changes also occurred in my life and in my head. A child can change a sense of national identity easier than an adult; still, it is always a process. My own naturalization in Polish was fast, which is normal with children—this was prompted by the needs of everyday communication with my peers. But adopting a national culture through its great literature takes longer and requires learning as well as a good teacher. I owe a lot to my high school Polish teacher Ms. Eugenia Sasin. I think she started teaching before the war, but she also had a real pedagogical talent. She treated us like her intellectual peers, and she organized discussions during which she was able to take our points. She taught us civil discussion and to formulate our thoughts precisely, and the art of writing. She was like the best of university teachers; without her I would not have become who I am today. This was during the darkest Stalinist night. There was one thing she could not openly convey to us—the political aspect of national identity. This had to mature under the skin. In this respect, the defining moment came with the fall of Stalinism. I was close to nineteen, and in the strong limelight of the October 1956 events in which I participated I realized that I was a Pole and not a Russian.

In May 1956 at Warsaw University there was a conference of the university chapter of the Union of Polish Youth (ZMP) at which I was elected as a delegate to the country-wide meeting scheduled after the summer break.[31] The university delegates turned out to be a cohesive group consisting of rebellious and determined people who easily took over the ZMP University Board, which was falling apart. We acquired an official platform to conduct work that, to our minds, was revolutionary. Shortly after the summer break my companions entrusted me with setting up a collaboration with the ZMP unit at the car factory FSO in Żerań. Lechosław Goździk recently had become the First Secretary of the Party there.[32] I was issued a permanent pass to the factory, and every day I went there at 2:00 p.m. to engage in discussions with young workers in the production departments after the end of the first shift.

The political crisis in communist Poland and the governing party was heading toward its spectacular resolution. The Plenum of the PZPR Central Committee scheduled for October 19 was to give the post of the First Secretary to Władysław Gomułka who had been recently released from prison.[33] It was also to remove some Moscow protégées from the Politburo, notably the Soviet Marshal Constantin Rokossovsky who was the Polish minister of defense.[34] These changes were not even consulted with the Kremlin. The Soviets considered this a blatant violation of internationalism—that is, the rules of vassal dependency. A top-level Soviet delegation arrived unexpectedly in Warsaw to demand the retraction of the personnel changes, curtail the press that was out of control, and consolidate the shaken dictatorship. At the same time, two armored Red Army divisions supported by smaller units of the Polish Army moved from their barracks in Legnica and Pomerania toward Warsaw. The Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev notified the leadership of the communist parties of China, Yugoslavia, Italy, and France that there was a counter-revolution in Poland to be suppressed by the Soviet Army within a few days. The threat of a "brotherly" invasion was hanging over Poland.

On October 19 I came to the FSO as usual. But something extraordinary was taking place there—several thousand workers had gathered at the gate. Goździk addressed the crowd from a truck parked next to the janitors' booth. He knew about the intended change in Party leadership from the Second Secretary of the Warsaw Party Committee, Stanisław Kuziński, and about the Soviet attempt to prevent it. He started reading the proposed list of Politburo members. With the exception of Gomułka, the names meant little to the workers, therefore Goździk pointed out that Rokossovsky was not on the list.

A silence fell. For the first time in my life I heard that great silence of a crowd that is usually followed by yelling and determination. Everybody knew Rokossovsky was sent by the Kremlin and understood this was a test between us and Moscow. To make things worse, a column of military vehicles was passing by, and Goździk added, "Armored vehicles are by our gates, and Marshal Rokossovsky surely knows this. He is still our defense minister."

The crowd erupted and there were angry shouts. Goździk mentioned that the KC plenary meeting was interrupted because the Soviet delegation arrived in Poland, and there were some movements of military units. Therefore the first-shift workers should go home for dinner and then return to the factory because there may be a need to protect it. The people figured out that this was about something more than the factory and started shouting that they were not going home.

The notions of the working class and socialist democracy were the foundation of my political primer. During that rally by the factory gates several thousand workers turned into a cohesive combative commune before my very eyes. But the platform of that change was not class but nation. We closed ranks facing a threat from Moscow. I was inside that crowd, and I understood and shared the emotions. I decided to stay in the factory with the occupying workers, and I called my mother to let her know. She simply replied, "Of course." I don't know how she coped with her own sense of national identity, but she readily assumed the role of a Polish mother; I placed that role on her without much thought.[35]

Everybody around Goździk was older than I. I think they treated me partially like a pet and partially like a camp follower. But they did not stop me from coming to the activists' meeting in the evening where the strategy was planned for the worst-case scenario. We already knew from the workers who commuted to the factory from Henryków near Warsaw about a column of some thirty tanks that was moving toward Warsaw, but then stopped in a forest near Jabłonna. Today we know that this was a Polish unit; the Russians were approaching from the direction of Wola, and they too stopped on the outskirts.[36] But then we did not know this, and Goździk proposed a plan of defense.

"I propose that we load trucks with sand, and block the underpass at the railroad bridge. We will take two flags, one red and one red and white, a supply of bottles with gasoline, and several boxes of forgings [these were metal components better suited for throwing than stones—KM]. We will stand behind the trucks. When the tanks come they will stop in front of the obstacle. The commander will open his trapdoor to look out [apparently Goździk had it all worked out to the minutest details—KM]. We will sing the *Internationale* and our national anthem. If they are Poles, they certainly will not shoot [I have no idea why he was so sure of this just a few months after the Polish army shot Polish workers in Poznań—KM]. But if they are Russians . . ."

And he spread his arms wide. It went without saying that the Russians would shoot at us, but we would chase them from Warsaw with our forgings and gasoline bottles. About this I had no doubts. I was ready to stand up to an uneven fight against my childhood heroes—the soldiers with the five-pointed stars on their helmets and uniform buttons.

Lechosław Goździk was first my role model, and then my friend. At the end of the 1990s I asked him at some social occasion how exactly he intended to stop the Soviet tanks with the forgings. Lechosław had a splendid sense of humor, but he answered completely seriously: "They would surely have crushed us, but future generations would know that we resisted.” This encapsulates the romantic trait in the Polish national tradition. In October 1956 I felt similarly. Alongside the great Polish romantic poetry, Andrzej Wajda’s movie *The Kanal* probably also contributed to this. As Goździk was planning his blockade I felt a surge of emotions typical of a nineteen-year-old—that perhaps we too will have our own insurrection.

As it seems, Chairman Mao Zedong saved our skins; he answered the letter from Khrushchev that notified him about the possibility of military intervention in Poland with a strong warning against the crisis in Chinese-Soviet relations. We had luck that our peers from Budapest lacked several days later.

On October 24 (coincidentally this was a day after the dramatic events in front of the Hungarian Radio building in Budapest) a giant rally was held in Warsaw in front of the Palace of Culture. Władysław Gomułka called for the jubilant crowd to go back to work, cease demonstrations, and not to create difficulties for the Party in ruling the country peacefully. At the university we were nonplussed. We understood that Gomułka wanted to stop our revolution before it even got started. So we moved to the opposition.

In the meantime two large groups of protesters carrying Polish and Hungarian flags formed. They were moving toward the Soviet Embassy. This cooled us down. We knew that Soviet tanks were still on the outskirts of Warsaw, and they should not be set rolling by a thoughtless march to the embassy. We slipped to the head of one of the marches and managed to draw the people to the great hall in the Polytechnic University. To placate the emotions, Krzysztof Pomian who led the assembly asked dramatically, “Who wants a new partition of Poland?”[37] The commotion subsided.

Others—including Jacek Kuroń and I—spoke in a similar vein. In the end, instead of resuming their march toward the Soviet Embassy, the assembly voted in a resolution calling for moderation.

This outcome showed a another side of the Polish national tradition, but different from the romantic one. In Poland this is labeled as positivist.[38] It is usually thought that these two traits, the romantic and the positivist, are contradictory. They both took shape in the nineteenth century and lasted throughout the twentieth century. They appeared interchangeably or simultaneously and competed against each other or enriched each other. In fact one would not be possible without the other. The romantic trait provides the determination necessary for the heroic struggle for freedom and ultimately for the sacrifice of life (preferably only one's own life). Such a stance may seem irrational, but it prevents the abandonment of the aspiration for national independence. The positivist trait is the base for a thoughtful calculation of national gains and losses and the directive not to spill Polish blood but instead to protect the biological, economic, and cultural substance of the nation.

The dialectic of romanticism and positivism is characteristic for a country lacking independence (like Poland during the partitions) or under foreign domination (like the Polish People's Republic). In my own life, dramatic tensions between the romantic and positivist paradigms occurred first in 1956 and then during the 1980/1981 Solidarity revolution. In October 1956 I was just discovering the aura and mechanisms of great social upheavals. My speech in the great hall of the Polytechnic was my debut as a public speaker. I was very passionate, as if the fate of the entire country depended on me. The situation on the streets of Warsaw was changing from moment to moment, and what we did was perhaps not entirely insignificant, but the political decisions were made high above us.

The year 1968 was another milestone in my biography between October 1956 and the Solidarity revolution. At that time Poland was not under a threat of military intervention. The national aspect of the social conflict was not directly expressed by tension between the romantic and positivist approaches. Yet the national aspect was present in our activities, and it deserves to be remembered.

On August 3, 1967, I was conditionally released from prison where I served a three-and-a-half-year sentence for "An Open Letter to the Party," written together with Jacek Kuroń. Jacek was released in May; he was rather unhappy because the court had given him a sentence a half year shorter than mine. Our returns were greeted by more people than when we were sent off to prison. In a natural way we both became spiritual leaders of the new generation of student dissidents. Its home was at Warsaw University, and its small milieu (in fact a few interconnected groups of friends from the departments of history, philosophy and sociology, economy, mathematics, and physics—all in all less than a hundred people) was given the collective name “Paratroopers” by the secretary of the University Party Committee. The name derived from the fact that these young, well-read, and outspoken people dropped like a parachuting commando into meetings organized by the Party and derailed the discussions with their inappropriate questions and comments. Among the “Paratroopers” there were quite a few remarkable personalities, but probably the most outstanding was a history student named Adam Michnik.[39]

In November 1967 in the Auditorium Maximum at the University, the Party organized a meeting with Walery Namiotkiewicz, a close collaborator of Gomułka.[40] He delivered a speech about Soviet foreign policy, and he stated that that policy had never been against the national interest of the Poles. The student Michnik took part in the discussion, and he quoted the famous October 1939 speech by Molotov, “Finally the ragtag State of Poland, a grotesque *bastard of the Versailles Treaty*, has ceased to exist,” and then Michnik asked, “What was the relationship of these words of the official helmsman of Soviet foreign policy to the Polish national interest?”[41]

This was an audacious question to which the speaker from the Party Central Committee could give no sensible answer. At the same time this was a disconcerting signal for the Party and the secret police. The “Paratroopers” were known as the so-called crawling revisionists, or young Marxist heretics.[42] Among them were sons and daughters of prewar communists who were dogmatically attached to the internationalist idiom. The Party, especially the faction led by Mieczysław Moczar that was growing in strength and was pushing for power, was convinced that these snotty noses who were horsing around at the university were nihilists in regard to the nation.[43] The Party honchos claimed a monopoly on patriotism (or rather on patriotic phraseology). Michnik’s question was a shock for them.

The nationalistic rhetoric of Moczar’s faction is presented primarily as an explosion of anti-Semitic propaganda in the March 1968 anniversary commemorations and in historical works. This is a simplistic picture.

Moczar's supporters, who called themselves the "Partisans," were seeking national legitimization for themselves by standing up for historical memory. This was the reason for honoring veterans of the occupation from both the procommunist People's Army AL and the London-affiliated Home Army AK, as well as restoring the luster of the romantic tradition of nineteenth-century national uprisings. The popular historical writings by Zbigniew Załuski were a decorous display of this orientation.[44] Its deeply concealed anti-Soviet subtext was to attract popular support. To bring this subtext out into the open was out of the question; this would result in a falling out of favor with the Kremlin, and in consequence a defeat in the struggle for power. The Moczarites too were the serfs of Moscow, and in fact their nationalistic rhetoric served them to deceive people. Split between the demands of servitude and the nationalistic demagoguery, the "Partisans" found themselves in an uncomfortable position when a new actor showed up on the stage—weak but independent from the Party with its inner coteries and games and not muzzled by self-censorship in their statements on the relations between Warsaw and Moscow.

The "Paratroopers" were a small group, and they had neither a structure nor procedures for making decisions. They acted spontaneously and even sometimes impulsively, and they were quick to react to events. On January 28 or 29, 1968, a few of them came up to me with the news that the highest authorities of communist Poland had banned the performances of *Dziady* (*Forefathers' Eve*) in the National Theater in Warsaw, and it was known that the sold-out performance on January 30 would be the last one.[45] I had seen many things before, but this was an unprecedented act of national blasphemy that required an immediate response. My apartment was bugged, so I tore a page out of a notebook and wrote, "Notify everybody that we are meeting before the performance in the foyer, try to sneak into the audience, and after the show we will yell 'FREEDOM WITHOUT CENSORSHIP!'" I did not need to say it twice.

The ambiguity of the slogan "FREEDOM WITHOUT CENSORSHIP!" was deliberate. A few days later we wrote in a flier distributed at the university that this call was a protest against censoring "the national tradition of freedom and democracy." At the same time our slogan was to evoke associations with Polish aspirations to unconditional independence, thus it questioned the so-called Brezhnev Doctrine.[46] No Party faction could afford that.

On January 30 we managed to run the planned protest in the audience, and in addition the Theatrical School students led by Andrzej Seweryn came to the theater with a banner: "We want more performances."[47] There was a street demonstration that was quickly dispersed by the Citizens' Militia (MO), with arrests and subsequent fines levied by misdemeanor courts. The "Paratroopers" successfully initiated a petition to the Sejm (Parliament) against banning *Dziady*, and after the letter with 3,145 signatures was delivered to the Sejm, there was a "leaflet war" in the Warsaw universities. At the end of February 1968, the Union of Polish Writers took a stand in defense of Mickiewicz, and at the same time in defense of the students. The prelude to the "March events" occurred under the banner of the defense of the romantic paradigm of the national tradition—that is, aspirations for independence.

The Party had an absolute monopoly on the press, radio, and TV. After March 8, when the protests spread to all the university towns in Poland and turned into mass student rallies, demonstrations, and strikes, the propaganda machine of communist Poland spilled a sea of sewage onto the several dozen students—the "Paratroopers." Today it is hard to imagine the disproportion of means between "them" on one side and "us" on the other. In January 1969, Jacek Kuroń, while a defendant in a trial, found appropriate words for this: "The largest propaganda campaign since Stalinist times was waged against a small group of young people armed only with typewriters." In fact we had no other technical devices. Our leaflets were typed, posted on walls, and smeared with glue on the outside so as to be harder to tear down by the SB officers and Party activists.[48] Using the wringer of a "Frania" washing machine as the simplest spirit duplicator that could produce twenty-five legible copies was a great feat of technical ingenuity of the opposition—but this innovation happened only in June 1968.

Moczar's coterie set the tenor of communist propaganda in March 1968. Its main rival—that is, Gomułka's governing faction—initially used similar language; it started toning it down only in the summer. Alongside the anti-Semitic stamp disguised as "struggle against Zionism" (a slogan borrowed from the Soviet repertoire during Stalin’s time), the key element of that campaign was to expose the hidden inspirers of the riots. They were supposed to be the Party honchos from the once-influential “Puławians.”[49] They already had been marginalized or completely removed from power, but supposedly they were seeking the opportunity to regain their influence and positions. Toward that end the “Puławians” were to use their own children who were supposed to be preeminent among the “Paratroopers.”

It was very hard to illustrate this ridiculous idea with concrete examples. Irena Grudzińska’s father was an undersecretary responsible for forestry in the Ministry of Agriculture.[50] Wiktor Górecki’s father was a general manager in the Ministry of Finance.[51] It also could be mentioned that Henryk Szlajfer’s father, Ignacy Szlajfer, worked for the censorship office, and Adam Michnik’s father oversaw an edition of Marx for the Party publisher, Książka i Wiedza.[52] This was not enough substance even for people used to lies. So in order to add credibility to the claim of the “Puławians’” plot, the authorities arrested Antoni Zambrowski.[53] Until 1963 his father Roman Zambrowski was a KC secretary, a Politburo member, and the actual leader of the “Puławians” group. However, in 1968 his son did not work at the university anymore and took no part in the “March events”—no evidence to the contrary could be conjured up. Zambrowski Jr. was charged with lending his friends prohibited books (which was true) and degrading the Polish nation in his conversations with his office coworkers (which was a lie). Still this was enough for the prosecutors to put him on trial alongside me, Kuroń, and the leading “Paratroopers” and to convict him. His name was needed in the press for the news on the sentences for the March events.

The dirt produced by the propaganda machine of communist Poland at that time contributed to the disorientation of a large part of the society, but there is no reason that it should sully our eyes today. The “March events” were a particularly complex phenomenon because two different conflicts coalesced and got mixed up with each other. There was a power struggle within the Party between Moczar’s faction and Gomułka’s ruling group (in this game the “Puławians” did not count anymore, and Gierek’s time was yet to come). The consequence and extension of that intra-Party rivalry was a personnel earthquake in the structures of the state. Simultaneously, and in a way separately, a social conflict erupted between the ruling Party and the intelligentsia and the students. The real issue at stake was the limited but real liberties that the Polish intelligentsia enjoyed after 1956 in the arts, scholarship, and university instruction. The self-governance of artists' unions and the autonomy of the academia that were inscribed in the law provided legal safeguards for liberties that even if they were not crucial in the political life of the country had a vital importance for the work of intellectuals and the education of the next generation of Polish intelligentsia.

For nearly twelve years after October 1956 the Party treated these small havens of free speech as a safety valve. As the crisis and tension in the society increased at the end of the "little stabilization," the valve became a crack through which the cumulating discontent poured to the surface of public life.[54] Gomułka's group, pressured by the "Moczarities," was leaning toward closing the valve by toughening censorship, reigning in the artists' organizations, and above all eliminating the autonomy of universities (by a new law on higher education that was voted in in November 1968 but prepared before March 1968). Yet during these twelve years, the intelligentsia got used to these liberties and took them for granted. So did the naturally combustible students.

The assault on these modest liberties that we called with some exaggeration "citizens' rights" in March 1968 had to be met with resistance. Our professors would have preferred to avoid the clash and keep their autonomy, but this proved impossible. Besides, it was the students who first entered the fray. Initially I was against calling for a rally. I too wanted to "protect the substance," and I had no doubts that a mass demonstration would mean crossing the Rubicon. The fragile tolerance by the authorities would end, and the young people who trusted them would end up in jails or removed from their schools with their lives ruined. But the authorities chose to remove some students before the mass protests. This was done in disregard of the law, and the authorities were not shy about regarding this as a precedent—that is, a pattern for new rules. Thus we were pushed to the wall and had to take up the challenge.

The words that I put into the proclamation of the March 8, 1968, rally about "the right to defend the democratic and pro-independence traditions of the Polish nation" do not appear in the later documents of the student movement. The mass meetings that we initiated with our protest were about defending much more limited liberties. The rhetoric of civil rights dominated, especially freedom of speech with the reference to the Constitution and sometimes to the principles of socialism. Yet the earlier ban on *Forefathers' Eve* that started the avalanche attacked the basic set of national values—we could not leave this without an answer. We felt we had no choice.

I am not convinced by the theory that the ban on the performances of *Forefathers' Eve* was a premeditated provocation by the "Moczarites." The Party archives seem to indicate that the decision was made by KC Secretary Zenon Kliszko at the request of the head of the KC Department of Culture Wincenty Kraśko.[55] Kliszko was Gomułka's right hand, and Kraśko represented a similar orientation. In the files of the investigation against Jacek Kuroń and me there is a memo of an SB officer on the audience's reaction during a performance of *Forefathers' Eve*. It is a list of dialogues that were met with applause. From that list it is clear that the audience understood Mickiewicz's words as a kind of anti-Party and anti-Soviet manifesto. This was of course an expression of the mood and tension. It was the result of a situation where the "safety valve," instead of dissolving the discontent, sent a dangerous signal of the mounting pressure. Before its inclusion in the file, that secret police memo was undoubtedly on Kraśko's and Kliszko's desks—such was the routine circulation of documents before a decision was made. True, Moczar was the Minister of the Interior, and the secret police could fiddle with the information provided to the Party decision makers. But *Forefathers' Eve* and the reaction to it was the talk of all Warsaw, and there seems to be little room for a secret plot. To the contrary, it seems that the Moczarite MSW and the Gomułkite leadership at the Central Committee were working in accord on the censor's ban. What is striking is their complete lack of respect, or rather the sense of national principles on the side of both factions fighting between themselves at the top of the Party. This was why we did not lose the fight on this platform despite the crushing disadvantage in the media.

The propaganda noise was not able to completely drown out the meaning of the events, as the propagandists had to write and comment on them. It was impossible to deny that first the students and then the writers stood up against the ban on the performances of a play that every Pole knew from school and regarded as a symbol of Polish aspirations for independence. The call "independence without censorship" made it through the media noise not only thanks to the broadcasting by Radio Free Europe but also because it was castigated by the Party newspapers, for instance in the reports from court cases. By banning *Forefathers' Eve* in the National Theater, those in power in the Polish People's Republic moved this drama to the national stage and cast themselves in the role of Novosiltsev.[56] Their patriotic or nationalistic rhetoric was exposed as a lie. In this respect we had no reason to feel defeated.

The sense of defeat reached me five months after the March events. I was in Mokotów prison, that is, in the right place for that situation. As a suspect, I was given the investigation files to study. Reading them was exciting and sometimes unnerving but introduced some structure for me. Breathlessly and with my heart in my mouth I read in my free time the reports and commentaries on Czechoslovakia in the Party daily *Trybuna Ludu* that was delivered to my cell. The "Prague Spring" stirred our hopes, but at the same time, there was a growing fear that it would be terminated by an armed Soviet intervention. The news that this happened dashed our hopes, yet it was not a surprise. The real shock was that alongside the Soviet Army and the troops from Hungary, Bulgaria, and GDR, the Polish Army played the role of the occupying forces. I felt deep humiliation and burning shame. It was as if somebody scornfully turned the beautiful slogan of the nineteenth-century insurgents directed to the soldiers of the invading armies inside out—our soldiers were going to Czechoslovakia "for our enslavement and yours."[57]

With the passing of time my anger at Gomułka for the repressions against me and my friends cooled down. I was beaten by him, but I had volunteered for the fight. I tried to hit hard and effectively, and not surprisingly I was beaten in return. It was worse with the "anti-Zionist" campaign and the pushing of thousands of innocent Poles out of the country just because of their Jewish roots. This wound is still sometimes tender, but as a matter of fact this was an internal Polish problem. However, I cannot forgive Gomułka the disgrace of August 1968, because what the Poles did to the Czechs and Slovaks at that time is also my disgrace.

Shame is a feeling of a higher order. As Teresa Bogucka sharply noted during a discussion on Jedwabne, the shame for the disgraceful deeds of our compatriots is a sure sign of a national bond. In the realm of European culture we do not believe in group responsibility.[58] We believe the perpetrators of deeds we condemn ought to be held accountable themselves. But if we really feel a part of a national community, we do feel the shame for the disgraceful things done by its members and in its name. In August 1968, in my cell in the Third Unit of Mokotów prison, I felt anger at the Russians from the Soviet Army as well as at the Germans from the National-People's Army of the GDR and the Hungarians sent to Czechoslovakia to dress up the Soviet invasion as an international one. But I was ashamed only for the Poles—the blind executors of Brezhnev's orders.

Thirteen years later I listened to the confession of one of these Poles. He was my close friend, or one can even say my cofighter, Janusz Bałenkowski, a worker at the Hydral air industry factory in Wrocław and the head of the Solidarity Factory Commission there.[59] I think it was in September 1981, after a union meeting in that factory or the nearby Predom-Polar factory. Janusz took me to a park to talk in private. He told me that in the summer of 1968 he served in the army as a tank commander. From April of that year they were secluded in some forest in Lower Silesia. They did not get furloughs, they did not see anyone outside their unit, and a blind fury was growing in them. Finally an alert was declared, and they moved toward the border. Janusz's tank was at the front, and it crushed the border barrier. On their way to Hradec Králové they did not encounter resistance.[60] At some point they passed some military barracks. Czechoslovakian soldiers stood behind the fence like prisoners, with no guns and no belts; they looked at the invaders and they cried. Suddenly they all turned around, dropped their pants, and mooned the occupiers.

Janusz was telling me this with a lump in his throat, that he had burst into laughter back then. Now when we expected the invasion ourselves, he wanted us to be able to protect Polish soldiers from the helplessness and defenseless that thirteen years before had been the experience of the Czechoslovakian soldiers in the barracks near Hradec. But I felt he had quite naïve ideas about how we should protect the Polish Army from being locked up in their barracks and that his reevaluation of a Polish soldier's attitude toward the events of August 1968 was rather more important. While recalling his experiences as an occupier, Janusz managed to understand his peers in Czechoslovakian uniforms, and he discovered shame—that shame that is the highest form of national sentiments.

I regret that during martial law, after Janusz Bałenkowski was released from an internment camp, he left Poland on a one-way passport with no right of return like so many activists of the first Solidarity.

Shame has therapeutic properties as well; it helps to cure xenophobic deviations in the national conscience. I was not free from xenophobia myself. It was instilled in me in my childhood together with the Russian nationalism of the time of the Great War. For the kids at the "Forest Spa," the pan-Russian national self-identification was the common juxtaposition of us and everyone who was allied with us versus the sinister Germans who embodied all evil (even if the Germans were abstract). "Za mir i svet my boremsia, oni—za tsarstvo t'my" ["We're fighting for peace and the world—while they, for the kingdom of darkness"] proclaimed a Soviet song about that war. Even today I get goosebumps when I hear this. The forces of darkness needed to be destroyed and every last of their bearers killed. But that column of German POWs we encountered during our walk with our teacher did not look at all like an evil power. They did not come across as powerful but instead exhausted, ragged, and helpless. This image, combined with the feeling of shame, then incomprehensible to me, stuck in my memory. I still was fond of drawing piles of German corpses. I kept drawing them in Poland because my Polish peers saw the Germans similarly. I should add that at that time the communist propaganda shamelessly manipulated the fresh traumatic memories of the Nazi occupation and the chauvinism that grew on that ground. When I was nine, I watched with sympathetic interest the city workers posting announcements calling for a vote according to the wishes of the Polish Workers’ Party. They declared, “Niemcom nie w smak 3 razy tak” [“Three times yes is not what the germans want”] with the ethnic name written in lowercase, disregarding Polish orthography.[61]

No wonder I once mouthed off at the dinner table, “All Germans should be shot.” My father took me down a notch by looking at me carefully and calmly asking if I thought my friend Barbel should be shot as well. Barbel was a year younger, and very small, and in our play I assumed the role of her protector. This was during the summer of 1946 or 1947 when I was vacationing at the Schaffgotsch family estate in Kowary near Jelenia Góra. Of course the estate was nationalized. Her family was deported to Germany during my first or second summer—I don’t remember which. I saw them leave with all their property loaded on a cart. A down comforter was tied with ropes to the trunks, and Barbel sat on top. She did not cry. Her face was very serious, and she did not look at me. I stood there looking at her and felt uneasy, the reasons for which I could not name. I still see this picture, but with time my inner uneasiness has assumed a lasting form of shame.

Yet this shame has its limits. I can easily show them on a map—this is the Odra-Nysa border. I believe it cannot be questioned or morally delegitimized. In Wrocław, which I consider my hometown, the melodious Lwowian pronunciation is heard even today. After 1945, a home and a new place on earth had to be found for the Poles from Lwów and Stanisławów. “German houses in Polish Wrocław—this is my homeland. For me Lwów is a foreign country.” I really do like Roman Kołakowski’s subversive song.[62]

Another limit for my shame is the demands of the German Federation of Expellees, and Erica Steinbach’s protestations.[63] I see no political or moral reasons to give in to them. History is twisted, cruel, and unjust, but I do not agree that the illusion of historical justice should justify compensating the heirs of Germans expelled more than a half-century ago at the expense of maintaining Polish hospitals and schools or state pension funds.

The national bond is a very important reference point for me. Without it I would not be able to sensibly relate my experiences. I enjoy a well-earned reputation for being a man on the left. Young people on the left, such as those close to the journal *Krytyka Polityczna*, along with those who draw from the tradition of anarchism, often talk to me and even listen to what I have to say. They are well behaved and sensitive and try not to show that they are perplexed when I use the word "nation." In their opinion the nation is a conservative delusion, an archaic spell without substance that a thinking person on the left (and they consider me to be one) should not use.

Ultra-modern Europeans view the notion of nation along the same lines, even if they do not evoke left-wing authorities. The same goes for the economists who have discovered that global capitalism is God's millennial kingdom on earth and preach this to the simple minded. I see no point in discussing this with the economists because their occupation does not consist in an exchange of views. However, I consider it my duty to talk to European modernists and especially to young leftists regardless of whether they would be willing to accept my opinions.

My professional expertise tells me that because nations have not existed since time immemorial, we should not assume they will last forever. I myself have researched ethnic communities that historians and anthropologists call tribes, older and smaller than nations. I know the role of the symbol of shared territory ("our land") and the myth of kinship that connects all members of a tribe to each other, to the tribal king (if there is one), and to the divine protector of the tribe regarded as the natural or adoptive forefather of the people. The archetypes of tribal mythologies have a long life and often have resonated in the national conscience well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Some good examples are the words of *Rota* by Maria Konopnicka or the term "fratricidal conflict" for civil war.[64]

Tribal political organization in Europe was destroyed by the states. The Christian monarchy could not coexist with structures that threatened its unity. Additionally tribes were the dens of pagan cults. We don't know how the process of uprooting tribal relationships occurred and how long it took. But national bonds, the ethnic corollary of medieval statehood, took shape very slowly, even if their seeds were discernible relatively early among the political elites. The prevailing opinion among historians as well as sociologists is that the modern nation, with its sense of community that includes all who consider themselves children of the same homeland regardless of class or political divisions, took shape after the abolition of estate barriers, that is, at the end of the eighteenth century and in the nineteenth century.

The looming end of the nations, prophesied in postmodernist European thought, is not a forecast based on historical, sociological, or economic knowledge but a typical prophecy. I remain skeptical. The advocates of that prophecy declare that globalization eliminates the instruments for controlling the capitalist economy from the national states and as a result undermines the foundations of the twentieth-century welfare state. This is a correct observation, but the conclusion of the end of nations does not logically follow.

Historians do not speculate about the future. Of course a historian can prophesy, just like a cobbler, an economist, or a poet, but he or she should not bring up the profession to create the impression that a prophecy is credible. Several times in my life I prophesied or expressed a warning that was interpreted as a prophecy. Later I was praised for this because it was thought I predicted correctly. I do not share this admiration, and I do not feel proud. Today I prefer to practice restraint and measure my words.

To my left-wing and Euro-enthusiastic friends who are prone to believe in the imminent end of the nations, I would advise caution. The collapse of the Soviet Union and shortly after that the collapse of Yugoslavia confirm the vitality of national communities, emotions, and conflicts. Nobody in their right mind would claim that Ukraine split from Russia or Bosnia split from Serbia because of rational economic considerations. The ethnic cleansing in the Balkans or the slaughter in Chechnya are undoubtedly tragedies, crimes, and humanitarian disasters—but we do not conclude from them that national conscience is just a source of misfortune. In our relatively calm country, journalists of every stripe lament a “Polish-Polish war” and urge that the rhetoric of interparty fights not tear apart the bonds that unite us. These bonds should unite us above all divisions that are natural in a democracy. The bonds that we evoke in our concern about the disintegration of society and the destruction of the state have national dimensions. Before they signed the Gdańsk Accord, Lech Wałęsa and Mieczysław Jagielski spoke about making a deal “Pole to Pole.”[65] This was of course a catchphrase, and further development exposed it to very hard trials, but I still believe that it expressed the attitudes present on both sides of that barricade and had a mitigating effect on the sharpness of conflicts—even during martial law.

After the fall of the Soviet Union and the triumphs of globalization, the world has become less predictable than in the second half of the twentieth century. The bipolar order supervised by the superpowers that divided the spheres of influence between themselves and did not permit conflicts out of their control is no more. The global financial capital broke free from the domain of the states, even these most powerful ones, and financial schemes are destabilizing economies in the United States and Europe. Combined with the deregulation dictated by doctrinal considerations and the crisis in social policies, this introduces a dramatic uncertainty about tomorrow and new social tensions into the everyday lives of the countries that have been well off until now. However, a nation is not an economic category. Economic turmoil does not cause nations to disappear. They existed before Keynes, and they will exist after Friedman. Their existence is not eternal, but their end does not seem near to me, and their slow demise can last for a long time, much longer than my life or even the lives of young Warsaw anarchists and their children yet to be born.

I point out these banalities because in times of turmoil and uncertainty, national communities can play an important role. First, populism thrives today, and wherever populists gain power, they try to institute a nationalist model against globalization. They implement protectionism, build walls around the national economy, and introduce the state control of banks. This is a coherent reaction, but it has little chance to succeed because a nation-state (especially one as small as Hungary) cannot by itself stand up to the power of global money. Still there are such attempts, and perhaps there will be in the future, always by resorting to a national community.

Second, a strong enough group of nation-states can try to challenge global money. This in fact is (or can be) the essence of the European project. Is the European Union up to it? Frankly, I don’t know. In any case, this would require a much greater integration of political and financial instruments that cannot be achieved without an agreement of the European nations. We should not forget that civil society and democracy exist only within national communities. There are no implemented and recognized structures of European (and even less global) democracy.

Third, futurologists can expect a trend to follow global economy with global politics. This would rein in global capitalism—but I see neither democratic mechanisms nor a democratic route leading to this goal. Conflicts about power in the world have occurred many times, but as a rule they were waged with the use of armed forces. Armies and arsenals are still in the hands of nation-states—as opposed to banks.

Burying nations seems premature to me, or even risky, as is every attempt to bewitch reality. It is better not to say “there are no such animals” as long as they really exist. We are one of them and have to move among them—it is best if we keep our eyes open.

NOTES

1. Jacek Kaczmarski (1957–2004) was a poet and singer-songwriter and considered the bard of Solidarity.
2. NKVD troikas, or Special Troikas, were People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD, which would later be the KGB) teams consisting of three officers who issued sentences to people after simplified, speedy investigations and without a public and fair trial.
3. Kozelsk, Starobilsk, and Ostashkov were the sites of the camps for the Polish POWs captured in 1939 and murdered in the Katyń massacre.
4. Katyń is a village near Smolensk in Russia and the place of mass political executions from the 1930s, including some 4,000 Polish POWs from the 1939 campaign during the spring of 1940. In April 1943 the invading German Army announced the discovery of mass graves in Katyń, but the Soviet Union denied responsibility until 1989. As the Katyń site was discovered first, it gave the collective name to the Katyń massacre of nearly 22,000 Polish POWs in several locations. Kharkiv, or rather the Pyatykhatky forest on the outskirts of Kharkiv, is the burial place for numerous Ukrainians and about 3,900 Polish POWs. Mednoe was an execution site with some 12,000 victims, half of whom were Polish officers executed in

the spring of 1940. Bykovnia is probably the largest site of mass murder from the Stalinist times, including some 3,500 Polish officers and soldiers.

5. The author’s birth father, Alexandr Budnyevich (1904–1958), was released from the camps in 1946.

6. The author’s mother, Natalia Wilter-Modzelewska (1907–1992), was a literary scholar and translator. She was a native speaker of Russian and educated in Romance literature. Among her accomplishments are a Polish critical edition of Anton Chekhov’s works and a Russian translation of the novel *Lalka* (*The Doll*) by Bolesław Prus.

7. The Thaw refers to the period from the early 1950s to the early 1960s, when repression and censorship in the Soviet Union were relaxed, and millions of political prisoners were released from the Gulag labor camps. The name “thaw” comes from the title of a novel by Ilya Ehrenburg .

8. Zygmunt Modzelewski (1900–1954) was a communist politician. From 1937 he was in the USSR; he was imprisoned until 1939. In 1943 he joined the Union of Polish Patriots. Between 1945 and 1951 he worked as a diplomat; from 1947 he served as Poland’s foreign minister.

9. The Great Purge was a campaign of political repression in the Soviet Union between 1936 and 1938. It also included members of the international Communist Parties residing in Moscow or summoned from abroad to the Soviet Union, including Polish communists.

10. The Comintern declared the KPP a hotbed of Trotskyist agents and dissolved it on August 16, 1938.

11. The Union of Polish Patriots (Polish: Związek Patriotów Polskich, ZPP) was a political body created by Joseph Stalin in 1943, primarily made up of Polish communists who were survivors of the 1930s purges.

12. Celeste Negarville (1905–1959) was an Italian communist politician and journalist and the first editor-in-chief of *L’Unita*.

13. Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya (1923–1941) was a Soviet partisan captured and hanged by the Germans.

14. The Polish People’s Army (Polish: Ludowe Wojsko Polskie, LWP) was formed in 1943 as the Polish First Tadeusz Kościuszko Infantry Division, also known as the Berling Army. It was subjected to the Union of Polish Patriots in Moscow and later became the armed forces of communist Poland (1945–1989).

15. Marshal Edward Rydz-Śmigły (1886–1941) was a Polish politician and commander-in-chief of Poland's armed forces during the 1939 campaign. The phrase, frequently misquoted, comes from his speech at the Thirteenth Congress of the Legionnaires in Kraków in 1935; it actually reads, "Not only will we not surrender our outfit, but not even a single button."

16. Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz (1894–1980) was a poet, essayist, dramatist, and writer. He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature four times. A longtime head of the Union of Polish Writers in communist Poland, he was criticized as a political opportunist.

17. Aleksander Jerzy Perski (b. 1947) is a Polish psychologist living in Sweden. He was one of the leaders of the 1968 student protests.

18. Reverend Jerzy Popiełuszko (1947–1984) was a priest in Warsaw renowned for his pro-Solidarity sermons. He was abducted and murdered by three SB officers. To placate the public outrage, his murderers and their direct supervisor were tried and sentenced to between fourteen and twenty-five years in prison. Jacek Kuroń (1934–2004) was one of the leaders of the Polish democratic opposition. Initially a communist, he evolved to become one of the founders and principal figures of KOR and an advisor to Solidarity. In post-1989 Poland he served twice as the Minister of Labor and Social Policy (1989–1990 and 1992–1993).

19. "What is the relevance of my mother's maiden name in the court proceedings? . . . Surely, there was a state in Europe where this was legally significant [that is, the Third Reich—Trans. note] and there were such laws. . . . There is no such law in the People's Poland, and shall not be, that the mother's, grandmother's, or father's name is the criterion for differentiating between citizens. . . . We are dealing here with replacing the criterion of nationality with a criterion of an entirely different sort; there is no need to name this criterion here." Quoted in Andrzej Friszke, *Anatomia buntu* (Kraków, 2010), pp. 831f, trans. FLV.

20. Aleksander Brückner (1856–1939) was a historian of Polish language, culture, and literature.

21. Ryszard Reiff (1923–2007) was a politician, lawyer, and journalist.

22. Jadwiga Staniszkis (b. 1942) is a sociologist. Romuald Szeremietiew (b. 1945) is a politician, writer, scholar, and one of the founders of the opposition Movement for Defense of Human and Civic Rights (ROPCiO).

23. Seweryn Blumsztajn (b. 1946) is a journalist. Between 1968 and 1989 he was one of the most recognizable figures in the Polish democratic opposition.

24. Zofia Kossak-Szczucka (1889–1968) was a Catholic writer and one of the cofounders of the Council to Aid Jews Żegota during World War II. She was known for her anti-Semitic statements before the war.

25. National Democracy (Polish: Narodowa Demokracja, also known as "Endecja," abbr. ND) was a Polish right-wing political movement active from the second half of the nineteenth century under the foreign partitions of Poland until the end of the Second Polish Republic. It ceased to exist in 1939.

26. The Polish United Workers' Party (Polish: Polska Zjednoczona Paria Robotnicza, PZPR, also referred to as the Party throughout this book) was the Communist Party in Poland. Created in 1948 by the forced merger of the Polish Workers' Party (Polish: Polska Partia Robotnicza, PPR, a Polish Communist Party recreated by Stalin in 1942) and the prewar Polish Socialist Party (Polish: Polska Partia Socialistyczna, PPS), the PZPR existed and ruled Poland until 1989.

27. The Battle of Monte Cassino (also known as the Battle for Rome) was a series of four assaults by the Allies against the Germans during the 1944 Italian campaign. Ultimately the German lines fell on May 18, 1944, under a joint attack by the French Expeditionary Corps, British Seventh Division, and Polish Second Corps.

28. The song "Czerwone maki na Monte Cassino" ("The Red Poppies at Monte Cassino") is one of the best-known Polish military songs of World War II. Its text reads, "The Red Poppies at Monte Cassino drank Polish blood instead of dew."

29. "Some of them were shot and they fell," with the last word following the Russian and not the Polish conjugation.

30. Władysław Broniewski (1897–1962) was a poet. A soldier in Piłsudski's legions and a hero of the war against the Soviets in 1919–1921, he was also an emblematic communist poet.

31. The Association of Polish Youth (Polish: Związek Młodzieży Polskiej, ZMP) was a communist youth organization that existed from 1948 to 1956. It was subordinated to PPR (later the PZPR) and acted as a tool of political indoctrination of young people.

32. Lechosław Goździk (1931–2008) was a worker turned political activist. He was one of the principal characters of the October 1956 crisis in Poland.
33. Władysław Gomułka (1905–1982, Party and underground pseudonym "Wiesław") was a communist politician and Party leader. A prewar communist, he spent World War II in Poland. From 1945 until his removal in 1948 for "right-wing reactionary deviation" he was effectively number 2 in Poland, after Bolesław Bierut. From 1951 until 1954 he was imprisoned. Following the October crisis, between 1956 and 1970 he was the first secretary of the PZPR and de facto ruler of Poland.
34. Constantin Rokossovsky (1896–1968) was a Soviet officer of Polish descent who became Marshal of the Soviet Union, Marshal of Poland, and served as Poland's Defense Minister from 1949 until his removal in 1956 during the Polish October.
35. Polish mother—a reference to the poem *To a Polish Mother* by Adam Mickiewicz, an emblematic work of Polish martyrdom in which a mother gives birth to a son who is to become a martyr-hero in the struggle for national liberation.
36. Wola is a district of Warsaw in the western part of the town; Żerań, where the FSO car factory was, is part of the Praga district across the Vistula River.
37. Krzysztof Pomian (b. 1934) is a philosopher. He is a professor of history at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń and academic director of the Museum of Europe in Brussels.
38. Polish positivism was the intellectual and social current dominant in partitioned Poland in the second half of the nineteenth century as a reaction to romanticism. It was characterized by rationalism and pragmatism (also political, that is, it renounced insurgency) and advocated cultural and economic advancement through "labor at the foundations" as the means to achieve national independence.
39. Adam Michnik (b. 1946) is one of the best-known Polish dissidents. A member of KOR, he is a historian, essayist, and public intellectual. He is the editor-in-chief of *Gazeta Wyborcza* (since 1989).
40. Walery Namiotkiewicz (b. 1931) was a Party official, personal secretary to Władysław Gomułka, and later the head of the KC Ideological Department.

41. Viacheslav Molotov (1890–1986) was a Soviet communist activist and politician. He served as chairman of the Council of People's Commissars from 1930 to 1941 and as Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1939 to 1949 and from 1953 to 1956. The quotation comes from Molotov's speech at the meeting of the USSR Supreme Council on October 21, 1939.

42. The terms "revisionism" and "revisionists" (Polish: *rewizjonizm*, and *rewizjoniści*) was liberally used depending on political expediency to denote anyone who tried to interpret or reinterpret Marxism in other than a dogmatic way, in particular in order to liberalize the system.

43. Mieczysław Moczar (1913–1986) was the Minister of Internal Affairs between 1964 and 1968. As the leader of the "Partisan" nationalistic faction in the PZPR he sought to undermine Gomułka. Moczar's ultranationalist, xenophobic, and anti-Semitic views influenced Poland's politics in the late 1960s.

44. Zbigniew Załuski (1926–1978) was a writer and journalist and is the author of books on Polish military history, especially during World War II.

45. *Dziady* (*Forefathers' Eve*) is a series of four romantic dramatic poems by Adam Mickiewicz, written in 1821, 1822, and 1832. It is regarded as essential for the Polish national identity. Its staging by Kazimierz Dejmek in the National Theater in Warsaw in 1967 (incidentally, commissioned to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Soviet October Revolution) was banned by the authorities because of its alleged anti-Soviet character.

46. The Brezhnev Doctrine was a Soviet foreign policy of limited independence of the satellite states in the Soviet bloc. According to this doctrine, no country could compromise the cohesiveness of the Warsaw Pact or be allowed to question the Communist Party's monopoly on power. The doctrine was introduced in the fall of 1968 to retroactively justify the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

47. Andrzej Seweryn (b. 1946) is one of the most successful Polish theatrical actors, a full member of the Comédie-Française, and the director of Teatr Polski in Warsaw. In 1968 as a theater school student he was arrested for printing and distributing leaflets against the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia; he was released in 1969.

48. SB was the abbreviation for Służba Bezpieczeństwa (lit. "Security Service"), the term for the secret police in communist Poland.

49. The Puławians (Polish: Puławianie) was a popular designation of one of two informal factions within the Polish Communist Party bidding for power in 1956. They were known as the reformists, whereas the other group, dubbed the Natolińczycy, were known as the hardliners. The name Puławianie comes from the apartment buildings at Puławska Street in Warsaw, inhabited mainly by high Party officials. Among the most prominent Puławians were Roman Zambrowski (1909–1977) and Leon Kasman (1905–1984).

50. Irena Grudzińska-Gross (b. 1946) is a writer and literary scholar. Imprisoned in 1968, she left Poland and completed her studies in Italy and the United States; presently she teaches at Princeton University.

51. Wiktor Górecki-Muhlrad (b. 1946) is a philosopher.

52. Michnik's father, Ozjasz Szechter (1901–1982), was a communist activist, journalist, and editor. Since the 1960s he was close to the opposition. Henryk Szlajfer (b. 1947) is an economist and political scientist. His and Michnik's expulsion from Warsaw University was one of the defining moments of March 1968.

53. Antoni Zambrowski (b. 1934) is a journalist and social activist. He is the son of Roman Zambrowski.

54. The phrase *mała stabilizacja* ("little stabilization") was in the title of a play by the poet and playwright Tadeusz Różewicz; it came to designate the period between the second half of the 1950s and the mid-1960s, characterized by the acquiescence of society to communist rule in exchange for partial liberalization and the improvement of economic conditions.

55. Zenon Kliszko (1908–1989) was a journalist and member of the Politburo. Wincenty Kraśko (1916–1976) was a communist activist, lawyer, and journalist.

56. Nikolay Novosiltsev (1761–1838) was a Russian statesman and close aide to Tsar Alexander I. As a tsar's commissar for the Kingdom of Poland, he was responsible for the arrests of student activists in Wilno in 1823, among them Adam Mickiewicz.

57. The author refers to the slogan "For our freedom and yours" (Polish: "Za naszą i waszą wolność") from the inscription on a flag carried during a demonstration to commemorate the Russian Decembrists, held in Warsaw

in 1831. The phrase has come to serve as one of the unofficial mottos of Poland.

58. Teresa Bogucka (b. 1945) is a writer and journalist. Since 1968 she has been involved in opposition activities. Jedwabne is a village in northeastern Poland where in 1941 its Polish inhabitants incinerated their Jewish neighbors in a barn.

59. Janusz Bałenkowski (b. 1947) was an iron worker and union activist. He left Poland for the United States in 1983.

60. Hradec Králové is a town in the Czech Republic about fifty kilometers southwest from the Polish border on the route to Prague.

61. The author refers to the 1946 referendum in which the communists sought to reaffirm their power in Poland. Answering "yes" to all three questions was tantamount to granting unrestricted authority to the Soviet-installed government.

62. Roman Kołakowski (1957–2019) was a poet, composer, and singer-songwriter. He lived in Wrocław.

63. Erika Steinbach (b. 1943) is a German conservative politician. She was the president of the Federation of Expellees (German: Bund der Vertriebenen) from 1998 to 2014, which represents Germans who after World War II either fled their homes in Central and Eastern Europe or were forcibly expelled. The organization has been criticized as having Nazi roots and downplaying or disregarding German responsibility for World War II.

64. "The Oath" (Polish: "Rota") is a patriotic poem by Maria Konopnicka (1842–1910) written as a protest against the Germanization policy enforced in the Prussian (and then German) part of partitioned Poland.

65. Mieczysław Jagielski (1924–1997) was a politician and economist. Between 1970 and 1981 he served as a deputy prime minister. He signed the Gdańsk Accord on August 31, 1980, as the head of the governmental delegation negotiating with the strikers.

Chapter 2

We Are the ZMP

The history train runs full speed
the century flashes—a semaphore.
A revolution needs neither glory
nor flowery metaphors.
It needs an engine driver,
him—
a comrade, a leader, a communist—
Stalin—the word that resounds.
—Władysław Broniewski, “Słowo o Stalinie” [“A Word About Stalin”][1]

MEMORY AND FEAR

Stalinism made human thoughts, feelings, and imagination uniform. This uniformity was enforced by the omnipotent state apparatus using a broad array of means. Did Stalinism manage to make memory uniform too?

The history of 1948 to 1955 often is reduced to a very simple scheme —not just in school textbooks and incidental writings but also in the personal memories of people who were then adults or who, like me, were just entering adulthood. There are many reasons for this. We do not need to put the entire blame for this tabloidization of memory on the people who shape today’s standards of political correctness. Conformism always plays an important role in the adjusting of one’s personal memory to the changing requirements of the day. It is an evolving phenomenon that is always present in social life. The norms to which the fanatics and conformists and people who were just scared—that is, almost everybody—adhered to in 1951 are symbols of disgrace nowadays. One cannot comfortably live with the memory of disgrace. Disgrace must be expunged from memory, and we must persuade everybody, especially ourselves, that we were forced to do what we did but we preserved our inner independence of spirit.

The greatest difficulty in any attempt to portray the state of conscience of the Poles during the Stalinist times is the specific mixture of fear, falsehood, outbursts of genuine enthusiasm, and sometimes real support for the dictatorship and its actions. This cocktail is impossible to untangle, as almost everybody spoke the same words and sentences. If they did not entirely believe them, they never revealed it, even in front of their children.

I think this confusion of attitudes was common. Fear was not unknown even to the most fanatic supporters of communism who were afraid to express their doubts because they knew how dangerous it was to have doubts. Support for communism in society always has been very hard to gauge, especially when there were no tools for assessment (and we still do not have them). My personal experience, albeit limited, leaves me no doubt that the scale of social support for the communist authorities and their actions was very substantial. This support was especially due to the rebuilding and industrialization of a country that was underdeveloped before the war and because of universally accessible education, including higher education for children of farmers and workers. The mass social advancement associated with these changes influenced the attitudes of millions of people, especially the young, before whom communist Poland had opened prospects previously beyond their reach. Even the opponents of the regime sometimes acknowledged its accomplishments, which they usually praised openly, as opposed to the long list of wrongdoings that these same people had to stomach in scared silence.

Attitudes varied, but their differences did not surface. Words not spoken fall out of use, and thoughts die or fall into a coma and dry out. At that time it seemed that everyone said what he or she were thinking—which was in accordance with the prescriptions of communist ideology and propaganda. Today it is easy to claim this was just a pretense. But the omnipresence of this pretense had important consequences for the language that the generation entering adulthood at that time spoke and thought.

A frank conversation about public matters between adults and children, or merely in the presence of children, was simply dangerous. Consider an event from my wife’s childhood.[2] She was born in 1949. Her mother had advanced tuberculosis and most of the time was in some hospital or sanatorium, while her father was harassed and arrested because he was suspected of belonging to the postwar underground and lived in a state of constant anxiety. Thus they decided to temporarily entrust the girl to her grandfather, a village smith and a member of the Parochial Council. He was a role model to his neighbors, and they discussed different matters including politics. People dared to be more frank in the country than in the city—although not in front of the children. But the little Małgosia was very curious, and sometimes she would hide under her grandfather's chair and listen.

In March 1953 the headmistress of Małgosia's preschool gathered all the children and said gravely that a great misfortune had occurred—Joseph Stalin had died, a great friend to children and a very good man. My future wife immediately protested.

"That's not true—my grandpa says that Stalin is burning in hell!"

Luckily the headmistress was decent. She summoned the grandfather and told him to remove Małgosia from the school.

"You know children—when they hear something unusual, they like to boast about it at home. If Małgosia disappears from school, the kids may forget. Otherwise you know adults—four of them will do nothing, but the fifth one will inform on you. This would be a disaster both for you and the girl. It's better that she stays away from this school."

This had a happy ending. Many stories ended up much worse. Topics about current politics or events from the recent past were not discussed with children because it was dangerous for both adults and children. In this way transgenerational communication was severed. Fear sat at the family dinner table and suppressed discussion about public affairs. Even if grown-ups chanted the required slogans at their meetings, it was difficult to repeat them unabashedly at home. When the time came to discuss the basic issues of public life, I and my peers knew no communication code except the language of communist ideology and propaganda. This was the language of the radio, press, school, and youth organization. The family was silent.

It was like this not just in families where older people secretly thought the worst about communism and the Soviets. It was the same in communist families, and in my family as well. It was only in 1954 during the Thaw that I learned about my father's prison odyssey in Lubyanka. Until then the truth about my grandfather and biological father also was hidden from me. In March 1952 the Military Intelligence arrested my parents' close friend Colonel Witold Leder.[3] He was a deputy of General Wacław Komar, the head of Section 2 at the General Staff, who was also arrested on the charge of spying.[4] I knew Leder quite well. We were on a first-name basis, and when he had not been by for a while, I asked his whereabouts. I was fifteen by then, but the answer was "Witold works for the intelligence services, and sometimes has to go away. No need to know where he is and what he's doing."

I should add that my father took some action in Witold's defense. He talked to Berman, and he talked to Bierut—of course it did not help as Military Intelligence was directly subjected to Moscow.[5] My father surely knew this, yet he did not hesitate to speak up for the arrested. Still, my brave and courageous father did not dare to tell the truth to his son.

Unless he lost control. This happened shortly after Witold's disappearance. Irena Krzywicka, a school friend's mother, liked to impress her son's friends.[6] One day she asked in my presence, "How did that spy Komar raise his daughter to become such a good communist?"

I don't know if she said it ironically or not; anyway, I decided to check the information. I had a way—I would ask a carefully phrased question during lunch or dinner because I thought that then my parents would tell me the truth. I repeated Mrs. Krzywicka's words without mentioning her, as if I was thinking about Komar and his daughter myself.

My father yelled at me, "What are you talking about, you little shithead! What do you mean, a spy?"

He had never spoken like this before. I stammered, "But he was arrested!"

"So what? Arrested does not mean guilty!"

This truth, now so banal, then sounded worse than the worst heresy. The inevitable conclusion from my father's words was that in Poland innocent people were arrested. Only the enemy would say this. In ZMP meetings there was a kind of ideological instruction when they explained to us that the enemy is subversive and hides and infiltrates everything, even the Party and the leadership. My father was an old communist and a member of the KC. But if he says such things, he may be a hidden enemy who managed to infiltrate the KC. It would have been better for me not to hear it. I put many efforts into forgetting my father's words that he yelled in anger and undoubtedly honestly. Yet I always remember them.

I also remember my father's disturbing opinion about the government's economic policy. In 1950 the six-year plan was amended at the request of the Kremlin by greatly increasing investments in the defense industry. The market equilibrium broke down, and there was a scarcity of basic food articles. Coupons were introduced for meat and fats. On January 3, 1953, coupon rations ware abolished, and the prices were drastically increased; wages were raised only slightly. The headlines in the newspapers declared this was an important step that lifted the standard of living of the working people. I ran the numbers over and over again, and it turned out this was a lie. I went to my father hoping he would help me understand and asked, "Dad, why did they do this?"

He answered with barely concealed anger—straightforwardly and with no sugarcoating—"To make people eat less and work more." I think he grew up with an emotional affinity with the workers that was then strengthened during his activity among the miners in Upper Silesia and in France. In this respect my father, who was otherwise well educated and polished in the salons of the French intellectual left, was different from the intelligentsia who came to the communist movement from their bourgeois backgrounds. To them "the working class" was a theoretical construct, a pillar of the ideology—whereas to him it was a natural reference, in a way stemming from his family background.

I witnessed a clash of these two sensitivities when at the beginning of the 1950s Józef Olszewski, then the First Secretary of the Katowice Provincial Committee and earlier my father's close associate in the Foreign Ministry, visited us in Warsaw.[7] It was clear they were friends; they spoke openly in my presence because they thought that no sensitive topics would come up. Olszewski boasted that he was coping well as the host of the Silesian mines and foundries, and he told my father about the rigorous fire-safety measures. Before taking the elevator, the miners were strip searched, and if even a matchbox was found, the miner was immediately fired.

My father became irritated. He screamed, "What's the difference between you and the prewar owners who treated the miners like cattle?

They also kicked them out for a matchbox. And we went on strike for this!"

He was so agitated that he pronounced the word "strike" in the Silesian dialect. Olszewski seemed surprised; he probably did not understand what the fuss was about. And indeed it was unusual that my father who had been in the government from the very beginning of communist Poland had preserved his emotions of a worker's child and activist. I witnessed that quarrel and I sensed it was about two contradicting values and that each had a point. I was deeply on my father's side. I think his emotions and reflexes significantly influenced my later attitudes toward relations between those in power and the workers.

Such conversations and outbursts that revealed what my parents really thought were rather exceptional. Normally at home it was just like everywhere else—the family was silent. Instead institutions spoke; their task was to indoctrinate citizens, particularly young adults. In addition to the Polish Film Chronicle, the Polish Radio, newspapers, and socialist-realist novels and films, we also were indoctrinated in school and by the youth organization.[8] From every side we heard the same things, and it was really hard not to give in.

Toward the end of 1947 or the beginning of 1948 we moved from Aleja Szucha to Wawelska Street, and in the seventh grade I changed schools. The rules there were quite different from my old elementary school. First of all there were no religion classes or morning prayers. Instead, for the entire seventh grade our Polish teacher started every lesson (five times a week) with a choral recitation of a poem by Adam Ważyk:

> Stalin's wisdom—is a great river
> That rolls its waters through mighty turbines,
> Sows wheat in the tundra, plants woods in the steppe,
> And establishes blooming gardens.
> The high mountains
> In the country of the poet Mao Zedong [. . .]
> [Stalin's wisdom] crunched the bedrock, knocked down landowners,
> And irrigated poor tenants' plots.[9]

It was the threshold of a new era. Ważyk's poem amused us, and we reworked it into a comic strip where the wisdom crunching the bedrock was portrayed as a mustachioed crocodile with long teeth, and the river sowed wheat from a sack. Nobody informed on us. Two years later we would not get away with such jokes; neither would we permit them ourselves, nor from others. This was because the new era indoctrinated us with our own hands by harnessing our young hearts and minds into uniform thinking and collective enthusiasm.

In 1950 we joined Związek Młodzieży Polskiej (ZMP). Following the advice of our teacher, nearly half my classmates did it on the same day. We came to class in the dress of our organization—green shirts with a ZMP badge on our sleeves and red ties. We felt better than those who were "not organized." We believed we had to lead them and, what was worse, to supervise them. While more serious matters in our school's ZMP were decided by the "district" (district board for Central Warsaw), at the level of a class, the class board had the say. This self-governance at the lowest level was a Makarenko-like educational concept.[10] The system tried (not without success) to turn us into its janissaries.

To tighten our ranks we had to have an ideal to believe in, as well as an enemy—an embodiment of evil that contradicted our ideal. The set of ideals and corresponding worldview were handed down to us; it was the extremely simplified and easily digestible Stalinist version of Marxism.

EQUALITY

Equality was one of our most important ideals. It is one of the foundational values of European culture—from its Christian roots all the way to the socialist and communist utopias. Even if communist Poland never matched the ideal, it significantly flattened incomes and increased social mobility. It gave longtime disadvantaged segments of society a prospect for advancement. This also was perceived and accepted by people averse to communism. Hence the societal approval for postwar ownership changes in the name of egalitarianism—land reform and the nationalization of industry and banking. In 1980–1981, when many demands were often made with no regard to what was realistic, a demand to reprivatize property taken by the state or distributed among the peasants in 1944–1946 was never put forward. Such a demand would seem outrageous because it did not exist within the axiological horizon of Polish society.

Solidarity was an egalitarian and collectivistic movement. We from the ZMP who in our adulthood became activists in the first Solidarity were already egalitarian and collectivistic in our green shirts and red ties.

During our ZMP period, alongside flat salaries, equality also included extensive social benefits: housing, nurseries and preschools, organized vacations for workers, health services, and finally the policy of full employment (sometimes implemented by force). Except for compulsory work, these benefits were approved by society, which is easy to find out by analyzing the August 1980 strike demands and the demands put forward by Solidarity during the following sixteen months. Only one part of the social package was contested—that which provided hidden consumption privileges (so-called shops behind yellow curtains) that were significant in times of common scarcity, as well as special retirement benefits to the ruling nomenklatura, the militia, and SB.

These special privileges versus the ideal of equality created a problem for me during my school years. My family's living conditions seemed to me to contradict the officially declared norm. My father was a foreign minister in office until 1949 and nominally until 1951. But after leaving the Foreign Ministry, he remained in the nomenklatura as a member of the Council of State, head of the Party Institute for the Education of Research Staff, and a KC member.[11] I do not know his salary—it was certainly less than ministers make today, not to mention business executives. But our standard of living was less determined by his earnings than by social benefits for the elite. Between 1945 and 1947 we lived in a five-bedroom apartment and then in an eight-room villa with a garden. They were both nominally communal dwellings for which the rent was next to nothing. In the villa, we also had a janitor-handyman and a housekeeper who cooked and cleaned, both on the payroll of the Office of the Council of Ministers (URM). At that time, cars were symbols of ultimate luxury. We did not have our own car, but a sedan with a driver was at my father's disposal, also at URM's expense. For vacations there were elegant retreats maintained by the URM or Ministry of Health in Zakopane, Jurata, or Międzyzdroje. We stayed there for pennies. Thanks to the "shops behind yellow curtains," we were not exposed to the nightmare of queues in which people stood for hours to buy a piece of cheap sausage.

All these luxuries came from a common pot—they were not private property and not inheritable; nonetheless they jarred next to the universal poverty. They were offensive because they were shamefully concealed. I was ashamed of these privileges, which speaks not only to the effectiveness of ZMP indoctrination but also to my home. I asked my father about this; he tried to respond but was not convincing—maybe he himself was not convinced.

My classmate Tadeusz Gulik pointed out my privileged status. There were three of us who were very close friends, practically inseparable. The third one, Andrzej Krzywicki, was the son of well-known writer Irena Krzywicka. Andrzej's father perished in Katyń (I don't remember if we ever talked about it), and his grandfather was the famous sociologist and socialist activist Ludwik Krzywicki. Irena Krzywicka was not in the Party but she was regarded as a so-called positive non-Party member, and in the 1940s she was even the cultural attaché in the embassy of communist Poland in Paris. She had an elegant and nicely furnished four-bedroom apartment on Langiewicza Street. I think Gulik's father was born in the village of Okuniew near Mińsk Mazowiecki, and during the German occupation moved to Warsaw. After the war he became a janitor in the Lumber Industry Trade Center. This family of six lived in one of the so-called Finnish cottages in the Pole Mokotowskie Park.[12] For that time this was still not too bad, especially because next to the house there was a little vegetable garden and a shack where they kept a goat. Still, the contrast was glaring between their living conditions, the relative comfort of Krzywicka, and my villa luxuries. We all took the ideal of equality to heart, yet it was somehow more personal for Tadeusz. He was suppressing his feelings until one day he handed us a poem he wrote. It was his manifesto of class anger and a declaration ending our friendship: "From now on I have nothing in common with you / I don't want to be friends with capitalists."

We went to my place to have a serious conversation. Andrzej and I argued that the class of capitalists was abolished along with the nationalization of means of production, and since 1945 differences in living conditions had no class character. Andrzej justified this completely logically. He was the ZMP leader in our class, and he had a precise, mathematical mind. He tried not to show his emotions but nervously fiddled with everything at hand. We were standing next to my desk, and while compulsively picking up stuff, he found a little tag. He read, "Property of the Foreign Ministry," with a number and date.

"See," he said, instantly switching from theory to experience, "even this desk does not belong to Karol!"

Tadeusz did not answer, but it was obvious that this example made a great impression. Our friendship survived this probe. Tadeusz never brought up the topic again. However, I was not entirely convinced. The privileges of my family troubled me, and I sensed falsehood in all arguments that justified such a state of affairs. It is not difficult for me to understand the motivation of young people from well-off families who joined communist movements in the name of equality.

I believe Irena Krzywicka moved to France in 1962 with Andrzej, who was seriously ill; Tadeusz accompanied them and took devoted care of his friend. In France Andrzej became a distinguished theoretical physicist, and Tadeusz became an outstanding biophysicist. Today they both are French emeriti professors. Tadeusz was a consultant to the largest cosmetic companies and made very good money. As befits a rich bourgeois, he owns a beautiful house with a large garden in Bure sur Yvette. I have not asked him what he thinks of equality.

BROTHERHOOD

The communist mirror reflected the French Revolution in a peculiar way. Just like equality, brotherhood had its equivalent. It revealed itself in the attitude of white-collar workers toward physical labor, especially toward the working class.

Today when thinking about Marxist education in the Stalinist ZMP, I am struck by the role played by the intelligentsia's complex about the working class. Besides, the cult of physical labor was nothing new to me—I had been raised with it in the Soviet orphanage. Mayakovsky's revolutionary poetry that shaped my child's aesthetic sensitivity called for forging a luminous future, "plechom k plechu molotoboitsa" ("hand in hand with the one who strikes a hammer").

This was a poet’s perspective and not that of a worker. The workers I met found nothing profound in hammering. When I performed hard physical labor in the Barczewo and Wołów prisons, I lost my penchant for romanticizing manual labor. But those experiences shaped my respect for physical labor and the conviction that it is no worse than intellectual work.

Yet the cult of physical work was less fundamental for Marxism and communist ideology than the myth of the working class that originated with Marx himself. His philosophy portrayed the proletariat as a collective persona deprived of property and control over its own work. At the same time the working class was the liberating power that by its very nature opposed the dictate of the capitalists. Only the working class could liberate itself along with everybody else through a revolution because workers’ enslavement was the arch-source of all enslavement of people by capitalists.

Thus in Marxism the myth of the working class was connected with the myth of the revolution. The Bolshevik revolution was the model, an example of how the proletariat changes into a power capable of overthrowing capitalism—not by itself, but by the missionary work of the conscientious intelligentsia. The intelligentsia brought a revolutionary conscience to the workers. This lesson was not lost on us and became the compass for our activism when we started our fight against the communist dictatorship. In our case, indoctrination did not serve the system well.

In universities practical training accompanied indoctrination in order to acquaint the students—the future communist intelligentsia—with actual working-class life and work, which we only knew from slogans. At technical universities this training assumed the form of “factory practicums.” Humanities students simply were sent wherever there was a need for seasonal workers, that is, to PGRs (State Collective Farms). In July 1955, after my first student year, I spent two weeks working the “harvest brigade” in the Rożnowo PGR, and then another two weeks digging potatoes in the Trumieje PGR.

This was long enough to experience a clash between theory and reality. We were taught that PGRs were the highest form of socialist agriculture. From this it followed that they should be more efficient than agro cooperatives and especially more efficient than individually owned farms. I was sure that PGR workers lived better than peasants, especially because in the individual farmer’s economy capitalism was reborn “every day and every hour,” and social stratification was ubiquitous. What we encountered contradicted this theory.

We saw great land estates in complete ruin. They were dramatically underinvested. In Trumieje the digging machines that we followed in the field to collect potatoes were pre-1914 museum pieces, and they constantly broke down. Besides, they were designed for horses, too light to be pulled by a tractor. They left most of the potatoes in the ground to go to waste. In Rożnowo there was no pigsty. Pigs were kept outside in a fenced yard so that they would not run off in search of food. In theory they were intended to be fattened, but they were emaciated, with sunken sides and protruding ribs, and were covered with dried mud.

We slept in primitive shacks on bedbug-infested straw mattresses, but we did not expect an elegant hotel. We fought the bedbugs by burning and replacing the straw. The canteen was worse. We were working hard, and during our first week in Rożnowo we were hungry. We did not get any meat, just a bit of lard and chicory coffee. We did not get milk at all, even if it often was kept in cans after milking for so long that it turned sour. Our argument that it would be better to take some of it to the canteen fell on deaf ears. The milk had to be delivered to the depot, and the canteen was supposed to be supplied by the county. When the director of a group of PGRs came on inspection, we surrounded him. We yelled at him, and the girls waved their pitchforks. The fellow probably got scared because he promised to improve the provisions. In fact after that we got some pieces of meat a few times, cottage cheese appeared for breakfast, turning milk for supper, and once we even had some sausage. We were proud that we had won slightly improved food for a few local workers as well. They apparently were bachelors or widowers because they ate with us in the canteen.

Just before we returned to the city, one of them explained to us that we had no reason to be proud. He was of indeterminate age, emaciated, unshaven, with missing teeth. Our meager earnings had been calculated, and the cost of our food was deducted. It turned out that as a result of our improvements, the daily cost of food had increased from 8 złotys to 9.20. He reproached us. For several days he was made to eat delicacies like meat or milk, but 1.20 złotys was a significant loss for him as he was barely making ends meet.

Nothing could have had a greater impression on us than his criticism. We had read *Capital* by Marx, and we knew that the level of workers' wages in capitalism was determined by an existential minimum. PGR workers in our socialist state lived significantly below that.

In addition to a naïve albeit noble attitude toward the working class, the communist brotherhood assumed a dangerous and even menacing form of collectivism. It was a compulsion applied to us by our own hands. The simplest example is the ritual of applause and chanting at the so-called academies, or celebrations for the October Revolution, the PKWN Manifesto, or Labor Day.[13] An MC would deliver the main address, and if the celebration was held at school, the ZMP chair or school board member would perform this role. The structure of the speech was predetermined; nobody tried to be creative or expected creativity. The same clichés were repeated like the liturgy. The same responses from the audience also were repeated like in church. Every time the name Stalin was mentioned, everyone rose, clapped their hands, and shouted, STA-LIN, STA-LIN, STA-LIN!

I cannot remember anyone not rising, clapping, and shouting, even if I am sure some people were privately less than enthusiastic about Stalin. I sensed the falsehood and compulsion in this ritual, even when I was a believing member of the ZMP. Yet I never broke rank. This was not so much herd behavior as fear. Solzhenitsyn mentions (I think in *The Gulag Archipelago*) the situation where clapping people's hands went completely numb, yet they would not stop—whoever stopped first, if noticed by informers, would end up in a camp. I never heard about such a case in Poland, but I remember it took a good amount of courage to stop clapping and sit down when others were still shouting. Nobody was directing this or giving the sign to jump up and shout the leader's name.

Similar rituals governed the First of May parades. Almost everybody participated, like in the "academies," except that the parades were even more choreographed. Activists directed us and handed us flags and banners with slogans approved by "the district," or even higher.

So-called agitation brigades allowed some individual activity during the preelection street rallies organized by the ZMP, I think in 1951. Their participants were primarily, if not exclusively, ZMP members dressed in organization uniforms. We looked and acted like a paramilitary unit—haughty and aggressive. We saw ourselves as the Young Guard of socialism and felt the urge to triumph over an enemy. The “district,” or perhaps the ZMP Warsaw Headquarters, was the initiator of these brigades, but we started the rallies at our school. We walked as a column chanting slogans and singing stupid propaganda songs (“Mr. Marshall & Co. / the phone and a double ‘o’ / he wants a colony in France . . .”). We were looking for someone to stand up to us, but no one did. Only once did someone whistle at us. All 150 of us immediately turned around and we surrounded a group of five teenagers dressed in the fashion of the so-called *bikiniarze*.[14] We pushed them against a fence and marched on chanting, “WITH LEARNING AND CULTURE WE WILL WHIP THE *BIKINIARZE*!” Scared and passive, the *bikiniarze* stood meekly. This was an easy victory.

Finally, in search of battles against the enemy, we turned to our peers. As we came of age, we changed from objects of indoctrination into its active and conscious subjects. I write this in the plural but I do not include all the ZMP members in our class of thirty. Almost half the class was “not organized”; they were seen as passive by definition. But the compulsory and extracurricular readings related to my ideological self-education, especially *History of the All-Union Communist Party* (*Bolsheviks*), made me and my closest friends realize that the ZMP was too large an organization to be the avant-garde for the circle where it was active.[15] We were too young to join the Party, and we decided to create an avant-garde in our school beginning with our class. We gathered a small but determined body of activists that, following Makarenko, we named a “collective.” At the beginning we were six or seven. The “collective” was an informal body led by Andrzej Krzywicki who was also the chair of the ZMP class board. We met at his mother’s apartment and planned how we were going to reeducate wavering individuals and isolate “enemies”—round them up and expose them to such pressure that they would convert to our side.

ZMP meetings were no longer boring; instead they assumed an inquisitorial dramaturgy. First the “collective” designated a victim, formulated accusations, and distributed roles among the discussants. Then at the actual ZMP meeting we performed a prerehearsed psychodrama. We castigated a colleague for visibly preferring swing dancing to the waltz, bending his legs too much at school dances (official dance parties called *wieczornice*), and wearing his hair too long. These were symptoms of emulating the Western lifestyle—a grave sin but possible to redeem. As the fifth speaker in a row asked the accused why he bent his knees so much when dancing, our poor colleague answered, “I just like to dance.” This proved how deeply entrenched were his faults. At the end of the meeting someone collected change so we could send the sinner to the barber. The poor thing started to cry, and the next day he came to class with short hair. We felt deep satisfaction. Like the inquisitors of old, we wanted above all to bring the sinner to contrition so that he could return to the Church.

We didn’t just need those lost souls, we also needed an enemy. We decided that the head of the enemy group should be Jola Klippel. She was “not organized,” nor were her friends. They were a tight pack who clearly liked each other. Also, Jola was the prettiest girl in the class, and every adolescent male resented her for not being his girlfriend. We tortured her mercilessly. Someone stole a notebook of her drawings from her backpack and brought it to the ZMP board. She had a sketch of a bison on which she marked its genitals with two lines. We regarded this as practically hostile propaganda—the principles of socialist morality required a bison to have no genitals. At the meeting that was her trial, Jola showed us the drawing in our biology textbook that she had used as a model. It also showed two lines for the bison’s genitals. Yet this excuse did not deter our vigilance. “Why did you draw a bison, and not a paramecium, for instance?”

Among the official complaints against Jola was also that of passivity. We made her produce a board newsletter as community service. She drew nicely and illustrated the newsletter with drawings in which someone’s watchful eye spotted some hidden hostile content. This was much more serious than bison genitals and also required a ZMP meeting. We had to bring her as she was not a ZMP member. In her conversation with Agata Tuszyńska, Jola remembered with gratitude that I warned her of the looming danger.[16] I don’t remember this, but I rather think that at the meeting of the “collective” I displayed my usual wavering—for instance, by speculating that she harbored no evil intentions when illustrating the newsletter. Therefore my colleagues, out of concern for my firmness, may have assigned me the responsibility of bringing her to the meeting. And I suspect that instead of firmness, I again showed my “intelligentsia wimpiness” and warned her what to expect.

In my memory Jola assumes heroic dimensions. She came to the meeting but did not confess. Her answers were calm, logical, and dignified. Afterward Irena Krzywicka tried to make her confess, also to no avail. This must have been very hard for a fourteen-year-old, and the echo of that trauma still resounded in her conversation with Tuszyńska. Maybe Jola was not entirely fair in that conversation, but in the 1952–1953 school year the smell of sulfur really hung over our inquisitorial skirmishes. Luckily we did not ruin Jola’s life, but the trauma stayed with her until her death several years ago.

Our “collective” poisoned the air for one school year. In March 1953 Stalin died. Shortly after his death the doctors were released from prison.[17] The woman who informed on them had her Order of Lenin revoked, and the official announcement on closing the investigation stated that the unjustly accused physicians were subjected to inappropriate methods of extracting confessions. The first winds of the Thaw were blowing. After summer break a new ZMP board was elected, and in the changed atmosphere the “collective” simply fell apart. It was like we were returning from a long trip.

This experience left me feeling ashamed that I had taken part in a witch hunt. Pursuing a “black sheep” is not limited to Stalinism or communism; it is a very old mechanism still present in our lives. I experienced this disease in my puppy years, and I developed antibodies. When a group turns against an individual, I unmistakably recognize the roar of the hunt, and I have the impulse to resist it. Such an impulse can be seen as a compass. It is an immunological reaction and the proof of health.

NOTES

1. Trans. FLV.
2. Małgorzata Goetz (b. 1949) is the author’s third wife; she is a radio journalist.

3. Witold Leder (1913–2007) was a military and intelligence officer and a translator from and to the German.

4. Wacław Komar (1909–1997) was a longtime officer of communist special services. Arrested in November 1952, he was tortured to extract the confessions incriminating Władysław Gomułka and Marian Spychalski. In December 1954 the investigation against him was discontinued, and he was released.

5. Jakub Berman (1901–1984) was a prominent communist activist. Between 1944 and 1953 he was regarded as Stalin's deputy in Poland—in charge of the Ministry of Public Security. Bolesław Bierut (1892–1956) was a communist leader, NKVD agent, and hardline Stalinist who was president of Poland between 1947 and 1952 and then prime minister until his death.

6. Irena Krzywicka (1899–1994) was a Polish feminist, writer, translator, and women's rights activist.

7. Józef Olszewski (1916–2002) was a politician and Party activist. He was close to the "Puławians" faction.

8. The Polish Film Chronicle (Polish: Polska Kronika Filmowa, PKF) was a ten-minute-long newsreel shown in cinemas prior to the feature movie.

9. Adam Ważyk, "The River" (Polish: "Rzeka," trans. FLV). Adam Ważyk (1905–1982) was a poet and essayist. Initially an avant-gardist, he became a strong supporter of Stalinism and socialist-realism that he subsequently repudiated, and his 1955 "Poem for Adults" (Polish: "Poemat dla dorosłych") marks the end of socialist-realism in Polish literature.

10. Anton Makarenko (1888–1939) was a Soviet educator and the author of *The Pedagogical Poem*. He developed a communist model of upbringing children in self-governing collectives and established a network of orphanages for street children, *besprizorniks*.

11. The Institute for the Education of Research Staff (Polish: Instytut Kształcenia Kadr Naukowych, IKKN) was a KC-affiliated advanced education institution established in 1950. Its mission was to train the leadership cadres for Polish higher education according to the Soviet model.

12. Finish cottages (Polish: *domki fińskie*) were small wooden single-family dwellings imported in the late 1940s and 1950s, mainly from Finland in exchange for coal, or donated by the Soviet Union. They were meant to temporarily alleviate the scarcity of housing, but some of these cottages are still in existence.

13. The Manifesto of the Polish Committee of National Liberation (Polish: Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego, PKWN), known as the July Manifesto or the PKWN Manifesto, was published on July 22, 1944, and its anniversary was observed in communist Poland as a state holiday.

14. *Bikiniarze* was a Polish equivalent of the Soviet *stilyagi*—a counterculture current from the late 1940s until the early 1960s that expressed rebellion against the gray communist reality by the wearing of extravagant clothing and fascination with everything Western (especially jazz).

15. *History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks): Short Course* (Russian: *История Всесоюзной Коммунистической Партии (Большевиков): Краткий курс*), translated to English under the title *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course*, is a textbook on the history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, commissioned and edited by Stalin himself, and first published in 1938.

16. Agata Tuszyńska, *Długie życie gorszycielki: losy i świat Ireny Krzywickiej* (Warszawa: Iskry, 1999).

17. The so-called doctors' plot, in which a group of Moscow physicians, predominantly Jewish, were accused of planning to kill the Party and state leadership through medical malpractice.

Chapter 3

A Revolution in Need of Repair

> True freedom exists only in the place where there is no ordinary freedom.
>
> —Sławomir Mrożek, *Out at Sea*[1]

FREEDOM IN THE HOUR OF TRUTH

Of the three principal ideals of the French Revolution, freedom was the most troublesome for communist ideologues. This was a paradox because the Jacobins already had a problem with this concept, and they found a solution. Under their rule the guillotine ran around the clock. The opponents of the revolution lost their heads, but so did the revolutionaries who were deemed not radical enough, wavering, or unreliable. Aristocrats were sent to the scaffold, and Vandée peasants were massacred. The justification was at hand already under Robespierre, and the Bolsheviks, who since 1917 had been following the Jacobin example, simply took over their call, "No freedom for the enemies of freedom." The communist revolution freed the proletariat and other social groups from the capitalist yoke, thus it was the embodiment of freedom. By gagging opponents or cutting off their heads, the revolutionary dictatorship was actually defending freedom. This reasoning was well known to the masses of communist believers. It was repeated by participants in countless ideological classes and never openly questioned. Rumors about extracting false accusations and self-accusations by torture were rejected as enemy propaganda, and Radio Free Europe who spread this propaganda was jammed because it was the voice of enemies of freedom.

In a closed-session speech during the Twentieth CPSU Congress, Khrushchev gave the number of delegates to the Seventeenth Congress (in 1934) and the members of the Central Committee formed at that congress who fell victim to Stalinist terror.[2] The great purge of 1937–1938 and the subsequent waves of terror devoured 1,108 from the 1,966 participants in that congress. From 139 members and deputy members of the Central Committee elected at that congress, "98 people (approximately 70 percent, as Khrushchev pedantically calculated) were arrested and executed, mainly in 1937–1938.” This bloody statistic shows that the risk of being imprisoned, sent to the camps, or executed was greater the higher one was in the Stalinist hierarchy.

Khrushchev did not randomly pick 1934 as the chronological base for these grisly statistics. The Seventeenth Congress took place after the eradication of intraparty opposition groups and the completion of forced collectivization in the countryside. The Central Committee elected at that congress consisted of loyal Stalinists. By giving the numbers of imprisoned and executed, Khrushchev clearly demonstrated that the Great Terror was an intolerable massacre of our own people and not a justified extermination of the opponents of the dictatorship. With these statistics we can easily imagine the spirits of the Soviet ruling elite in Stalinist times. Molotov was the prime minister, yet he did not have the courage to ask for the release of his own wife who was in a camp. These people lived in constant paralyzing fear for their own and their families’ lives. Their first instinct after Stalin’s death was to provide basic safety for themselves. This could not be done in secret. Stalin’s heirs did not trust one another or their police. For their own safety they had to repudiate the system of terror because only open stigmatization of the abuses could prevent repetition. In order to sleep without fear, Stalin’s heirs had to free from the threat of terror not just themselves but also their subjects and reveal at least part of the truth. This was risky, because with the words of truth the genie of freedom also escaped from the bottle—ordinary freedom, that is, not “true freedom.”

The case against the doctors was dropped shortly after Stalin’s death. The condemnation of the “unlawful methods” to which they were subjected during interrogations was the first timid step toward revealing the truth about the terror. But the Aesopian language of the official announcement was understandable to those who could read between the lines—quite a few people at that time. So the Thaw began, so called after the title of a novel by Ilya Ehrenburg. The first social upheavals in the communist empire, especially the East Berlin strikes and workers’ protests on June 17, 1953, suppressed by the Red Army units, did not stop the process of de-Stalinization. In June 1953 the CPSU leadership managed to eliminate Lavrentiy Beria, and in December his close associates from the

NKVD were tried, and the omnipotence of the Soviet security apparatus was curtailed. As a result, the situation in Warsaw also was changing.

In May or early June 1954 my classmate Jan Lorin, a son of a reémigré from France, who worked in the Foreign Ministry mentioned to me in a tone somewhere between a question and statement, that my father had been in a Soviet prison in the 1930s. A year earlier I would have considered this ridiculous. Now I was not so sure, and I decided to check it. I did it with my usual method by asking a carefully prepared question at dinner. My father was already quite ill—it was shortly after his third heart attack. The doctors decided not to keep him in the hospital but to treat him at home. We dined together, and I asked him, “You were lucky you went to Russia in 1937, and not 1939, when the Red Army took Vilna and Lviv, and many Poles were imprisoned.”

He looked at me with visible irony and answered dryly, “By then I was out of prison. I was held at Lubyanka between October 1937 and July 1939. They tried to extract a false self-accusation from me, and false confessions against other people. Lubyanka ruined my heart—before that it was very strong.”

I did not dare ask for details. From his terse response I gathered that he was tortured and that false accusations and torture were a common Soviet practice. I did not have an opportunity to return to the subject again and learn more. My father died on June 18, 1954.

A few months after his death, my mother added to my knowledge of my family history and general history that earlier had been kept from me. At almost seventeen I was not a child anymore, but I felt as if someone was tearing apart a pastoral painting with a gruesome reality hiding behind it. She told me the whereabouts of my biological father—previously his absence had been explained to me by his ostensible participation in the war against the Germans. She also told me about my grandfather and about the Soviet concentration camps in the same way that Solzhenitsyn would describe them. According to my mother at least eight million innocent people were held in the camps. It was clear this was not about a closed tragic chapter in history but a drama that still was not over, and one that concerned Poland as well. I also learned from her about our friend Witold Leder. He was released two or three weeks later, at the end of 1954.

Before his arrest he was hefty; now I saw an emaciated man with a gray, sallow complexion, but psychologically unbroken. He told us he was not beaten but sleep deprived. In secret police lingo this was called a “conveyer,” a Russicism for an assembly line. The officers interrogated a prisoner for days and nights on end, changing every few hours. For his first six weeks Witold was not allowed to sleep, even for an hour. He withstood this, but most of his coaccused broke down and let the interrogators record confessions that were dictated to them as devised by the investigation directors.

A year later I learned firsthand about the conditions of life and death in the Soviet camps from my biological father. His story about the death penalty for disciplinary violations of camp rules sticks in my memory. In 1938 at evening roll calls they read out lists of those executed by firing squad: “For playing cards, for sexual intercourse with a woman, for consistently failing to fulfill work norms; the sentence of capital punishment has been passed . . . ,” followed by the names, ending with “prigovory vvedeny v ispolnenye” (the sentences have been carried out). I did not think that Stalinist camps were the same as Nazi camps, but the similarities were hard to miss.

Some of this information came as personal testimonies. Moreover, all of the stories were from people whom I absolutely trusted. They totally contradicted official declarations. Between June 1954 and January 1956 I learned over and over that a giant lie was the foundation of the indoctrination of my generation. Now this lie had collapsed in a confrontation with the truth, and as a result my worldview broke into pieces. I had to comprehend and somehow explain this new knowledge to myself to make sense of it and compose a new picture of the world from the shreds. Most of my peers found themselves in a similar situation in the spring of 1956.

The harbingers of a political crisis appeared shortly after Stalin’s death and Beria’s fall. The escape to the West of Colonel Światło, who was in charge of investigating the Party elite, played a special role.[3] His revelatory broadcasts for Radio Free Europe could have been rejected by the orthodox Party members as enemy propaganda, but among the key PZPR activists they caused a storm. Information about the intraparty fights on the role of the secret police in the state was leaking beyond the governing elite, and echoes of these fights were spreading with a ripple effect. Foment also was growing among intellectuals, along with the publication of nonconformist literary works (especially *Poemat dla dorosłych* by Adam Ważyk) and increasingly daring texts in such weeklies as *Kultura*, *Po Prostu*, and *Nowa Kultura*.[4]

Warsaw University, where I was a history student, registered these signals of the changing atmosphere like a barometer. This was a unique place in many respects. The tenor among the historians was set by excellent non-Party member professors: Tadeusz Manteuffel, Stanisław Herbst, Stefan Kieniewicz, Marian Małowist and his wife Iza Bieżuńska, and Witold Kula.[5] During the occupation, they had been affiliated with the clandestine university or with the Information and Propaganda Bureau at the Home Army Supreme Command. In 1945 they exchanged their insurgent armbands for professorial gowns to rebuild and preserve Polish scholarship and higher education. Manteuffel, their undisputed leader, categorically announced to Aleksander Gieysztor, who wanted to join the WiN leadership, “Now we are no longer fighting partisans, we are building a University.”[6] The communist authorities received that choice with understandable relief, but scholars of recent history still have to explain by what miracle that fragile and unwritten compromise between the two uneven sides held until the fall of communism.

Our academic mentors were no political radicals. After the war, they transformed from romantics into positivists. They were “protecting the substance”—which included their students. If they stood up in defense of free thinking and freedom of speech, it had a limited scope—they only wanted to protect scholarly research, publications, and university instruction. Young rebels like me were unjust to our moderate masters when we regarded their doctrine of “protecting the substance” as a disguise for their conformism. In fact, we owed our training in independent and critical thinking to their organic labor since our first year at university. This training turned out to be handy when taking our first independent steps in public life as it was losing its balance before our very eyes.

The Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna (the State Pedagogical College) History Department was dissolved in the 1955–1956 academic year. In the political market of communist Poland this was highly a regarded college, a true “foundry of cadres.” The students moved to the Warsaw University History Department, thus boosting its political potential, soon to become a reservoir of rebellion. There were many colorful characters among the newly arriving students, but undoubtedly Jacek Kuroń was the most colorful. I saw him first at a general assembly of the departmental ZMP. It was nearly compulsory to belong to the ZMP at the university. We were tightly packed into a small auditorium, but Jacek spoke as if at a crowded rally—with broad gestures, a booming raspy voice, spontaneously, and without clichés. Our discussion was not very radical and stayed largely within the frames of the Thaw. But Jacek declared this was opportunistic, and he spoke in a style I had not heard before. “In the ancient times Greek sailors crossed the Mediterranean with loads of wine and olive oil. When a hurricane threatened to destroy the ship, they opened the barrels and poured the oil on the roaring sea. Under a layer of oil the sea calmed down. They sailed on a smooth surface while underneath there still was a storm. We are like these sailors! We debate secondary matters as if nothing extraordinary was happening. A storm is boiling underneath the surface, and we sail on unaware of what is coming.”

This was bombastic, like some prophecy, but became a reality shortly afterward, starting with the report of the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev, *On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences*. For most of my university peers this was the initial source of the horrifying knowledge about the Stalinist terror.

That report was read at a closed session of the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on February 25, 1956, and it was neither intended for publication nor to be known to all party members. In Poland things were different because the head of the Polish Party, Bolesław Bierut, had died in Moscow during the congress. The political infighting brewing within the Polish Party was rapidly exacerbated by a succession struggle. In the heat of that struggle in March 1956, the Polish Politburo decided to publish Khrushchev’s “secret” report internally and send it to all Party cells in the country (there were several thousand of them). Despite being stamped “Exclusively for Party Cell Use,” this effectively released it to the general public. It was read aloud at open Party meetings—open also to non-Party members. I was not a Party member yet, and I listened to the report at an open Party meeting, standing in the packed Lecture Hall 17 at the Warsaw University History Department. It was read for over two hours by Henryk Samsonowicz and Antoni Mączak, who took turns.[7]

Khrushchev's revelations deeply shocked the listeners. Fierce ZMP activists who had been raised in the spirit of communism and Marxist orthodoxy were undergoing a crisis of faith similar to the one I had gone through two years earlier when I learned about my secret family history. This time the news about the mass crimes committed under the banner of communism came from the most authoritative source—the CPSU general secretary himself. His message made clear that the daily practice of the system glaringly contradicted the ideals professed by that same system. We had to explain that contradiction and find a practical way out of this unacceptable situation. While Khrushchev placed the blame for the decades of bloody terror squarely on the deceased dictator and not the dictatorship, this explanation was not good enough for us. We saw that the roots of evil were in the system and that such a system must be overthrown by a revolution. As young Marxists, this was what we were taught. We knew that revolutions are created by the working class supported by the intelligentsia who bring a revolutionary conscience to the workers. This ideological premise gave birth to the radical version of so-called revisionism.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks introduced revisionism as a derogatory epithet very early. They labeled the social-democratic reformists from the Second International as "revisionists" who deserved condemnation because they revised (that is, doubted) Marxism. By stigmatizing their opponents, Lenin and his supporters labeled themselves as orthodox, or true, guardians of the doctrine. As opposed to orthodoxy, revisionism as such was an equivalent to heresy. These religious or outwardly clerical connotations of two opposite notions clearly indicate that Marxism, a child of European culture, sprang from Christian roots and within the communist movement served a role similar to religion.

As long as we were revisionists we angrily denounced this stigmatizing label given to us by the ideologues of the ruling Party. Today I concede that they had a point in that terminological squabble. Initially we were adherents to the system and believers in its ideology. Then we rebelled because in practice the system trampled the ideals of its theory. We wanted to overthrow it in defense of these ideals. We were indeed like heretics ready to fight the Church in the name of the Gospels.

The shock caused by Khrushchev's report started discussions throughout Poland about the nature of the political system that had lost its Marxist legitimization. Trust in the stability of the social order was shaken. What seemed infallible turned out to be brittle. The idea dawned that one could raise a hand against the dictatorial practices of the authorities. Likely this sparked the workers' rebellion in Poznań. The panicky reaction of Poland's highest authorities to the Poznań factory workers' general strike and mass street demonstration sealed the complete ruin of the system's propaganda façade. After the army bloodily pacified the workers' protest and Prime Minister Cyrankiewicz declared that "the authorities of communist Poland will cut off the hand of any provocateur or madman who dares raise it against them," questioning the class nature of that authority became unavoidable.[8]

In 1956 Warsaw workers were politically active in a less spectacular but also consequential way. Lechosław Goździk, a tooler at the FSO factory in Żerań who was elected first secretary of the Party Factory Committee, called for the creation of factory workers' councils all around Poland to seize control from the ministerial and industry bureaucrats. During these stormy months the press was on the loose, and it publicized the FSO initiative widely. I and my fellow radical university students saw the call to take over factories by workers' councils as the awaited sign, banner, and program of the revolution that will end the dictatorship. In September Jacek Kuroń, Krzysztof Pomian, Andrzej Garlicki, and Bogdan Jankowski met Goździk and set up a collaboration between the university ZMP units and the FSO.[9] Implementing the Marxist-Leninist formula of the intelligentsia bringing the revolutionary conscience to the working class, students were to organize discussions with young workers in Żerań. I have no idea why I was assigned this task. It became my first and formative experience with workers.

On October 24, 1956, in the largest square in Warsaw in front of the Palace of Culture, 200,000 people sang, "May you live a hundred years" to

Władysław Gomułka. The celebrated leader then called for the people to return to work and leave politics to the Party. We deplored this. We had just returned to the university, resolving that we would move to the opposition, when someone dashed up and yelled that a large group of demonstrators was marching toward the Soviet Embassy. We ran after them and managed to lead them to the Polytechnic University where we tried to persuade them about the need for moderation.

We felt caught in the cross fire. A day before, the revolution in Hungary had started, and Soviet tanks entered Budapest. We shared the widespread fear that a similar disaster may befall Poland. We regarded ourselves as revolutionaries, but the positivist imperative to protect the national substance tied our wings. The general view, shared by the noncommunist public intellectuals, was that we should live with what Gomułka was offering, as that much was achievable. We felt sorry for the Hungarians, and we needed to take care of ourselves.

It soon turned out that we young revolutionaries of 1956 were weak, abandoned, and lacked determination. We were cofounders of the Revolutionary Union of Youth (RZM), which had the promise to become a dynamic countrywide organization with substantial membership (over twenty thousand) but was short lived. Initially the Party apparatus was developing a counter-balance called the Workers' Youth Union (ZMR) in factories and demanded the RZM be restricted to universities. When this failed, and the political pluralism of youth movements became a reality in factories, the authorities changed their tactics. They decided to merge the RZM and the ZMR into a single Union of Socialist Youth (ZMS). The former RZM activists initially played an important role in the ZMS, but in less than a year the Party managed to placate them.

At the same time the authorities disciplined the revisionist-inclined press by levying Party and administrative penalties on their journalists, mostly Party members. In October 1957 the popular weekly *Po Prostu* was shut down, and riot police brutally dispersed the three-day-long Warsaw student demonstrations in its defense.[10] The workers' councils that were instituted and elected in 1957 were not dissolved but rather marginalized and left to die. The command-and-quota system in industry that prevented workers' councils from making decisions was preserved practically intact. In spring 1958 these councils were ultimately stripped of power by inclusion in the so-called Workers' Self-Governance Conferences where the Party factory committees and Party-controlled local union leadership had the advantage in numbers and say.

Gomułka implemented his normalization by gradually eliminating these post-October changes that did not fit in the structural frames of a communist dictatorship. This was done in exchange for limited liberalization. As a result, Poland stood out favorably against the background of other communist countries. By saving the system's framework, Gomułka likely saved our skins. But the revolution that we wanted was finished before it got started. What was left was an advance for the future—the legacy of critical thinking and a seed of a new utopia. We preserved this in our fragile store of memory.

One exception to this was a declaration of principles by the university rebels written to prompt a discussion that eventually led to a program for a new revolutionary organization. I think Jacek Kuroń was the principal author. But the text was never published; it circulated unsigned as a typescript or duplicator copies. It took the form of a proclamation by a "collective close to the ZMP University Board at Warsaw University." It was undated, but its content indicated that it was written shortly before the KC Eighth Plenary Session (October 19–20, 1956), which restored Gomułka to power. Recently Joanna Szczęsna and Wanda Lacrampe, at my request and following my suggestions, unearthed this document in the State Archives of New Records among materials from the Warsaw Committee of the PZPR. It survived incomplete—the working program is missing. Still, the critique of existing social and political relations reveals the nature of our conclusions.

The "ideological and political platform" presented by the authors begins with a rhetorical flourish as if it was lifted straight from Leszek Kołakowski's satire "Czym jest socjalism?"[11] I do not believe we knew this piece, but we thought along the same lines. "We want to build socialism in Poland. For this, we have to firmly renounce everything identified with socialism in the past, and that we do not believe is socialism." These words were followed by five arguments unmasking what Stalinism, as opposed to socialism, “was and is.” A half century later three of these arguments still deserve commentary.

“Stalinism contradicted, and still contradicts, the principle declared by the communists that a socialist state is a state of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The state system created by Stalinism is a dictatorship over the proletariat, the peasantry, and the intelligentsia. In such a system the actual power in the state belongs to a small group of Party and state apparatus that governs relying on an extensive enforcement apparatus: political police that intervene in all spheres of social and personal life; labor camps that also provide slave labor; and provisional courts that have nothing in common with law or justice.”

“Stalinism contradicted, and still contradicts, the principle declared by the communists that the base of the socialist system is communal ownership of the means of production, and that a precondition for the development of this base is communalization of the means of production owned by small-scale producers through voluntary aggregation into cooperatives. In Stalinism *the means of production* were communal in name only. In fact they were run by a small group of bureaucrats, a social group that while governing the means of production in the name of the masses gradually changed into their *sole* owner. In Stalinism the communalization of the means of production belonging to small-scale producers in the countryside and towns was far from voluntary; to the contrary, it was imposed through economic and extra-economic pressure.”

“Stalinism contradicted, and still contradicts, the principles declared by the communists regarding the rules of *proletarian internationalism*. The discrimination of particular nations in the USSR in the name of the Russian *raison d’etat*; breaking and limiting the sovereignty of the countries of the socialist camp in the name of the Soviet *raison d’etat*; and the actual contradiction of the rule of the impossibility [*sic*—K. M.] to export a social revolution by bayonets—in our opinion all of these have nothing in common with communism. Moreover, they violate the interest of communism in every particular country, as well as the good name of international communism.”

These fragments show our criticism of the system at its most radical. Still, inner inconsistencies are apparent. The phrase “Stalinism contradicted, and still contradicts,” repeated like a litany, seems to suggest that the practice we condemned was still occurring because it was a social-political system that had to be overthrown, and not just the bad past that needed to be overcome. Despite this, we wrote about Stalinism in the present and past, as if we could not decide. We wrote about “the dictatorship over the proletariat” held by the Party and state elite. We wrote that by governing autocratically and with no social controls, this elite was turning into the sole owner of the state means of production (or the ruling class, to put it in Marxist terms, which we did not do at that time). In a different fragment of our “ideological and political platform” we demanded the restoration of the agency of Party cells, as if we did not know that the rules and practice of so-called democratic centralism made these organizations an instrument of that same ruling elite. These inconsistencies indicate that although we were beginning to think like an antisystem opposition, we wanted to act like an intrasystem opposition. This could not fly. Besides, the authorities would not allow it anyway because their liberalism did not go so far as to tolerate any opposition—whether intra- or antisystem.

Reading these four pages found in the Archives of New Records today, I think what is important is not that we lost but that despite the inconsistencies and lack of precision, our thinking at that time contained the ideological genotype out of which “An Open Letter to the Party” sprang some years later.

REBELLION AND UTOPIA

A lasting result of de-Stalinization throughout the Soviet empire was the condemnation and abandonment of mass terror. Poland was no exception, although it stood out with its consistency in implementing the changes. After 1956 only people who crossed certain lines in their opposition activities and ran into open conflict with the system could expect to be jailed on political grounds. The state did not interfere with citizens’ private thought or speech. The Party gave up imposing the communist ideology on society at large. Those who did not rebel slept safely. It is difficult to imagine today the relief with which these modest changes were received. It needs to be added that physical torture during investigation was prohibited and the autonomy of the court was generally respected. While there were instances of political pressure on judges, this was done with the pretense of adhering to the letter of the law.

A radical exception in the Soviet empire was that after October 1956 the authorities of communist Poland allowed farmers to withdraw from cooperatives and did not try to enforce collectivization. This had profound consequences for the society. The current generation of economists and social scientists who lament the archaic structure of the Polish countryside either do not fully understand or do not appreciate this.

The condition of the Catholic Church in Poland after 1956 also was exceptional if compared to other communist countries. The authorities abandoned and condemned the brutal attempts to subject the clergy to the dictate of communist power, such as that which culminated in the 1953 imprisonment of Primate Wyszyński.[12] Despite recurring conflicts and continuous pressure, the Church remained a large institution independent from the mono-party. This had profound consequences for social life and Polish culture that are appreciated even today.

Lastly, after 1956 the Polish communist state was unique in its liberalism toward artists, scholars, and academia. It seemed like the benevolence of the political authorities toward intellectuals was a whim that could be revoked at any time. But Gomułka’s government saw a safety valve in granting considerable freedom to intellectuals in their professional capacity. Better that intellectuals spend themselves on low-circulation publications, university seminars, and small theaters than enter politics. Jerzy Grotowski initially was one of the most radical ZMR activists, but he realized he had lost and he turned to avant-garde theater that average people would not understand anyway.[13] Fine, let him direct and collect laurels. Besides, some of the Party luminaries such as Adam Rapacki or Stefan Żółkiewski were probably genuinely convinced that the people’s authorities should provide freedom of thought in science and academia because without it they cannot progress.[14] The 1956 ministerial decree and then the 1958 law on higher education granted autonomy to universities. Poland was the only communist country where professors elected their deans and rectors. They knew not to elect people whom the Party saw as political opponents, but the Party also knew not to push for the election of candidates who would not have support in the academy. Thus the practice of compromise emerged.

In the “ecological niches” created by that compromise, Polish scholarship and university instruction acquired genuinely propitious conditions for development. This coincided with the beneficial opening of the country to the West. The years 1956 to 1968 were a period of bountiful harvest for Polish humanities. After 1968 the autonomy of academia was revoked, and scholarship suffered irreparable personnel losses. But then the workers’ rebellion and the replacement of the governing coterie brought a real liberalization of the state policy toward intellectuals, even if not inscribed in the law. At the same time, the idea of autonomy was not dead. In the fall of 1980 the Warsaw University faculty elected Henryk Samsonowicz as their rector in the first free election in twelve years. This was not based on an active law, but the Minister of Higher Education sanctioned it. Samsonowicz was forced to step down during martial law, but the Sejm continued to work on legislation restoring the autonomy of the academy. It was finally approved in 1982. After communism collapsed, this autonomy was written into the 1997 Constitution. This is a very fortunate development because in free Poland some ruling circles also give in to the temptation to put scholars and universities on a short leash.

The post-October 1956 changes that favorably singled out Poland among the Eastern European communist states lasted mainly because they could be reconciled with the principles of dictatorship. This was not enough for the revisionists, especially the young ones. When Gomułka pacified the unruly press, the youth organizations and workers’ councils tried to resist, but our resistance was scattered and weak. Our programmatic horizon encompassed the demands to transfer the governance of companies to workers’ councils, the limitation of censorship, and the full freedom of intraparty discussions. Yet there was no room for political pluralism. Our resistance was within the framework of a mono-party, and it was pacified by party discipline. By being inside the Party or its affiliates, the revisionists lasted longer, but despite our hopes we had no chance of success.

I joined the Party in March 1957. This was the result of mature consideration. Two people suggested to me that I needed to make this decision, Jacek Kuroń and Antoni Mączak. Jacek argued that the struggle between partisans of democratic change and those who wanted to preserve the institutional heritage of Stalinism will happen within the Party. Therefore if we wanted to participate, we needed to be in the Party. I fully shared that view. On the other hand, Mączak was a type of positivist rather than a fighter. In 1957 he was the secretary of the Party cell at the History Department, and he formally asked me to file my declaration. Seven years later, on October 27, 1964, the Warsaw University PZPR Committee unanimously approved a (wholly justified) resolution on my and Jacek Kuroń's expulsion from the Party. Antoni Mączak chaired that meeting. His turn came in 1982—he decided that nothing good could be achieved within the Party anymore and left it. The circle had closed.

In 1956 our audacity did not extend as far as to demand a multiparty system like a bourgeois (that is, Western) democracy. We did not seek pluralism within the youth movement either. We did not protest when the Union of Young Democrats (ZMD) was denied registration—for us it was on the fringe. We also did not resist when our own RZM was merged into the single youth organization ZMS. We were even glad that the idea failed of having separate organizations for young workers and students. Only in Kraków did part of the RZM refuse to join the ZMS, so Jerzy Grotowski created a platform for them within the ZMS, the Polityczny Ośrodek Lewicy Akademickiej i Robotniczej (Political Center for the Academic and Workers' Left). The opposite side mobilized their apparatchiks. To eliminate Grotowski and his backers at the ZMS provincial congress, they started with the election counting committees and the age-old method of ballot stuffing. A scandal ensued. The ZMS Provisional Central Committee sent a commission to Kraków to investigate electoral fraud. I was on the commission with three workers from the FSO car factory—Ryszard Adamkiewicz, Marek Borusiński, and Szymon Firer. We tried to go to the factories, and even held a kind of rally in the Factory of Railroad Engines in Chrzanów, but the revolutionary mood had vanished. The Party apparatus had lots of experience and practice in such cases, and they handled us without much trouble, even if not immediately.

The activists who came from the RZM tried to regain their lost positions. Sometimes they even succeeded. In the summer of 1957 my colleagues conceived a scheme to change the leadership of the ZMS

Warsaw Committee. At a plenary meeting in September, they managed to recall the old secretariat, electing a new slate that included the former leader of the RZM Józef Lenart, as well as Eugeniusz Noworyta, Zdzisław Kuksewicz, and me.[15] This transpired in my absence; in September I was visiting my mother's cousins in France. When I read in *Le Monde* about the shutting down of *Po Prostu* and the ensuing students' protests in Warsaw, I changed my train ticket and returned to Poland. By then the smell of tear gas was gone. The disturbances had started with a rally in the courtyard of the dorm at Narutowicza Square. The rally was started by two Warsaw ZMS activists, Janusz Gilas and Leszek Gronostaj. What was worse from the authorities' perspective is that the activists used the ZMS Warsaw Committee's duplicators to print the leaflets, which resulted in a search of the organization's offices. On top of this, the new ZMS secretariat initially refused to condone the decision to scrap their favorite weekly. Therefore all members of the secretariat were summoned to the Warsaw Committee of the Party and forced to read the proofs of the banned final issue of *Po Prostu*. This was supposed to convince us that the journal had become anti-Party. Two or three of our colleagues presented the required elasticity of necks. Still, the situation in the Warsaw ZMS required thorough healing. We naïvely thought that the matter would be democratically solved by a vote at a plenary session of the ZMS Warsaw Committee. But the party demanded that its own special team had to decide first.

This was the first time I encountered the institution of a Party special team, but not the last. The team consisted of Party members who were also board members of an organization that was not part of the Party, but of course acknowledged its "leading role." This special team would gather to discuss a decision among themselves to ensure it would reflect the Party perspective and then have it adopted at a meeting of the organization. In October 1957 the meeting of the Party team at the ZMS Warsaw Committee was chaired by Witold Jarosiński. The Party leadership could have easily found a better person, but they did not want a deal. They wanted to give orders. Jarosiński was well suited. At the Party team meeting it was not just accepted that people would speak out, it was desired. Complainers could say things within a closed circle to prevent them from expressing inappropriate opinions in an open forum. Most of the participants were scared by Jarosiński and returned obediently to the ranks. Only three colleagues expressed their criticism about shutting down *Po Prostu* and the riot police attacks on the students—Józef Lenart, Zdzisław Kuksewicz, and myself. The resolution of the meeting invoked Party discipline and prohibited us from repeating our critical remarks in the presence of non-Party members. The only thing we were allowed was to submit our resignations with an enigmatic formula about a difference of opinions. At the plenary meeting, the non-Party colleagues turned to us for leadership. But we were members of the Party, and Party discipline kept our mouths shut.

When I was a Warsaw University student, and much later when I was a professor, students were taught to become scholars. This approach produced a very high level of student and was effective in the job market. In your third year you were supposed to pick a graduate seminar and an area of research. I choose the Middle Ages. In October 1956 I enrolled in Professor Aleksander Gieysztor's seminar. Unfortunately it met at 3:00 in the afternoon, and there was no way I could make it on time coming from the discussion meetings at the Żerań car factory. I showed up at class for the first time only in mid-November. I was five minutes late. Everybody was already sitting at the table. My teacher gave me a look over his glasses and said, "Mr. Modzelewski, what a surprise! Are you going to attend classes from now on?" I answered earnestly that it depended on the situation.

But the situation did not progress, so I attended classes and participated in reading and analyzing medieval documents, and I became a medievalist. It is a very labor-intensive specialty. It requires the commitment of so much time, ingenuity, and attention that not much is left for other preoccupations. I had to make a choice between my role as a social activist and as a historian. It was impossible to be both at the same time. In times of great tension and shakeup I was an activist, but other than that I was a historian. I devoted most of my life to this profession. My friend and sometimes coactivist Jacek Kuroń used to say ironically that I was a "Sunday politician," like a Sunday driver.

He was right. But at the end of the 1950s I was not the only one who had parked the revolution in the garage. The "little stabilization" meant that life became bearable. The soldiers and officers in the dismantled revolution found niches where they could live with self-respect and fulfill their professional aspirations.

My niche and profession turned out to be medieval history. I earned my master's in June 1959, and Gieysztor offered to keep me at Warsaw University. There were no openings for an assistant at that time, and initially I received a so-called doctoral stipend funded by the Ministry of Higher Education at the History Institute. This was just like an assistant position. I taught classes just like assistants do, and I started to prepare for my doctorate. In April 1961 Gieysztor recommended me for a yearlong research stipend in Venice from the Giorgio Cini Foundation. My stay in Italy was very important for my career as a historian; it also strongly pushed me back toward political dissidence. When I was imprisoned in the second half of the 1960s, the secret police (SB) desperately tried to uncover any enemy inspiration, preferably Trotskyist, from my time in Italy. This was not just prompted by random curiosity but by infighting at the top of the PZPR. Despite the role that the Trotskyism stun gun played in the Kremlin overlords' fantasies, and by extension in their Polish serfs' intrigues, it was simply beyond the imagination of the SB that comparison between the living conditions in communist Poland and Western democracy could prompt a person to become a dissident.

In Italy I could not help but notice that people openly criticized the government, the Christian-Democratic party, and even the system itself with no fear of reprisal whatsoever. In Venice I attended an Italian Communist Party meeting about the Twenty-Second Congress of the CPSU, and I participated in the discussion. However, I was not as impressed by their Eurocommunism as by the banal realization that it was not just an opposition party but an openly anticapitalist party and part of the normal political landscape. Of course I knew this even before coming to Italy, but theory is one thing, and seeing something with one's own eyes is something entirely different. I attended a student gathering at the great Ca' Giustinian Hall where the head of the Italian students' union, a calm, competent, and skilled orator, savaged the government's plan for higher education reform. I saw the strike at the University of Venice where Rector Italo Siciliano, a Christian-Democrat, sat with the students as equals on the steps of the main building to discuss the reform. All of this was *normal*. No one thought the system would collapse from this. Meeting a few

Trotskyites, many Eurocommunists, socialists, and Christian-Democrats in Italy did not turn me against communist Poland. The most significant and revolutionary thing for me was everyday freedom—the ordinary freedom that scares those who profess “true freedom.” I was seeing liberal democracy, which in communism was called “bourgeois” democracy. I saw how the communist party, socialists, left-wing student organizations, and trade unions benefited from it—hardly bourgeois organizations. I saw and envied it.

It cannot be said that I had been ignorant of communist Poland, but upon returning I felt profoundly the humiliating contrast between the everyday life of a free country and life in Poland at the time of the “little stabilization.” The authorities allowed us to live and work, and in the privacy of our homes we even could say what we were thinking—but not in public. We were so used to the gag that we almost did not notice it. Now I felt strongly that I had to return to the revolutionary path I left a few years earlier in order to live a normal life. I could no longer regard the renouncement of freedom in public as normal.

I knew I had to get back to my experiences with the 1956 rebellion and start over with a more thorough criticism of the system that had managed to pacify us. The first thing to do was to get together with people who felt and thought similarly to me. I turned to Jacek Kuroń. I regarded him as a leader in 1956, and out of all the university leaders from that time he was the one who influenced my thinking the most. We reunited shortly after my return from Italy in the spring of 1962, and I was pleased to discover that we were on the same wavelength. I am sure the pleasure was mutual. We agreed about the general direction and decided to start over where we left off—at the university. In November 1962 I had started a four-year doctoral program at Warsaw University and was a part of the so-called young research-teaching faculty. This also entailed belonging to the University Party and the ZMS cells. Jacek worked for the ZHP Headquarters and was not officially associated with the university, but several dozen of the students were his former scouts from “Walter’s Circle.”[16] Against the background of pervasive inertia, they radiated nonconformism and the desire to fight to better the world. This was enough to move the university, even if not the world.

The university should have been a place for discussion; instead the predominant mood was silent inertia. We wanted to change this by creating a political discussion club under the auspices of the university ZMS. I brought this idea to the ZMS and Party university leaders, and I got the green light. I talked to Aleksander Smolar from the ZMS and Włodzimierz Brus from the Party.[17] I regarded them as liberal and enlightened people of the establishment. I could not know that in six years they would be out of the Party, and Smolar will be in prison with me.

I became the chair of our discussion club and was elected a member of the Party University Committee that served as an umbrella to shield the club. I got permission for people outside the university to participate in our discussions. This was important because Jacek Kuroń and his opinions became the biggest attraction. However, the students—formerly Kuroń's scouts—contributed the most to the dynamics of the discussion. The club soon attracted restless souls from all over the university. People like Stanisław Gomułka, Waldemar Kuczyński, Ryszard Bugaj, and Stefan Meller started their public activity there.[18]

The secret service followed our activities closely and warned the KC. Those guardians of public tranquility clearly thought that regular public discussions held at the university were subversive and that the recently pacified opposition had gained a new platform in the club. The Political Discussion Club of University Youth (its official name) lasted for a year, from November 1962 to November 1963, before it was shut down. But a number of independently thinking young people participated, and they were not about to give up. Small discussion groups kept meeting either as ZMS groups or privately. These people knew each other from the club, could communicate across departments, and were capable of coordinated action.

We decided to organize such action around the university ZMS general meeting and election, which was called for in the beginning of March 1964. We were a majority because the participants in club discussions were largely the most active ZMS members in their respective departments, and we easily won the delegate nominations. Electoral rules required that two-thirds of the candidates to the new University Committee be proposed by the outgoing committee, and the floor could only propose up to one-third.

To propose a candidate above one-third, one had to indicate who from the committee’s list was to be replaced and then take a preliminary vote on the two candidates. This system prevented any grassroots initiative, unless the grassroots could organize itself. But we were organized. We coordinated our votes and easily eliminated the activists from the old University Committee. Thus the university ZMS fell into the hands of the dissolved discussion club. Marek Żelazkiewicz, formerly of “Walter’s Circle,” became the first secretary, and a radical club activist Eugeniusz Chyla from the Physics Department joined the secretariat. Stanisław Gomułka, Anatol Lawina, and I became members of the University Committee.[19]

The Party could not tolerate such rampart democracy within its student wing. The situation was additionally inflamed by the letter of protest against the tightening of censorship sent by thirty-four prominent intellectuals to the prime minister on March 14, 1964. On April 14 there was a short demonstration of support for the authors of the letter held in the university courtyard. We were not the organizers, but we had to take a stand, and our resolution was not in line with the Party. A conflict ensued in which the ZMS University Committee requested the reactivation of the discussion club, while the Second Secretary of the Party University Committee, Jan Detko, demanded that we condemn the organizers of the demonstration.[20] He summoned the ZMS University Committee’s Party group and, unable to obtain a majority, he pulled out a decision of the Party higher-ups that ordered us to comply under the threat of disciplinary penalties. So we submitted our resignations from positions to which we had been elected only a few weeks earlier. I was removed from the Party University Committee and reprimanded for instigating the Party youth organization against the Party. We had reached a wall. It was clear that independent activity would only be possible outside the Party and its dependent organizations, that is, outside of what was legal.

When Kuroń and I organized the discussion club and participated in electing new university ZMS leaders, we did not expect that these outposts of political freedom within a system that prohibited political freedom would last for long. We organized to develop a platform for an underground revolutionary organization. We met first on March 14, 1964.

We observed the rules of clandestine organization (or what we thought those rules were). Our team consisted of Jacek and me and five other people from the university: Marek Żelazkiewicz, Eugeniusz Chyla, Stanisław Gomułka, Gomułka's wife Joanna Majerczyk, and Bernard Tejkowski (head of the Student Revolutionary Committee in Kraków in 1956 and Zygmunt Bauman's assistant in the Warsaw University Institute of Sociology from 1962). Jacek also introduced three scouting activists: Mieczysław Krajewski from Warsaw, Andrzej Klimowicz from Lublin, and Andrzej Mazur from Łódź. Jacek and I also invited Szymon Fifer, a finisher from the Żerań car factory who was the ZMP head there in 1956. Fifer told us that we could count on the collaboration of six other workers from his factory who were previously associated with Lechosław Goździk, but he did not want to bring them to our meetings. This was wise—he proved to be the only one with any conspiratorial smarts. The effectiveness of our safety measures (finding "safe" apartments, avoiding phone calls, etc.) was nil because Andrzej Mazur was a very able Secret Service agent. Today his reports are a very valuable source for historians; they were also very valuable to the SB at the time.

Mazur had a colorful past. Born in 1928, during the occupation he fought in the "Gray Ranks" and in the Home Army. As a 1944 Warsaw Uprising soldier he was decorated with the Cross of Valor. After the war he was imprisoned from 1945 to 1946 and from 1950 to 1954, and he was a scouting activist since 1956. In 1959 he was enlisted as a secret informer (code name "Wacław"). He distinguished himself with exceptional intelligence and because he was not working for money. Because of Mazur the SB instantly knew about our activities and received drafts of our platform that we circulated among ourselves.

These drafts headed in different directions, and it was apparent they could not be combined. Mieczysław Krajewski strongly inclined toward Maoism. Bernard Tejkowski, a legendary figure from October 1956 in Kraków, professed views close to the future program of the KPN and was in sharp disagreement with Kuroń.[21] Around 1968 Tejkowski succumbed to an anti-Semitic obsession that led him close to Moczar's SB (more politically than as an agent). Finally in free Poland and under the new first name Bolesław, he became a leader of nationalistic skinheads. Stanisław

Gomułka presented ideas more suitable for technical discussion among economists than a political program for a clandestine party. As a result, a coherent text only could emerge from the fragments proposed by Kuroń and myself.

We assumed from the beginning that our platform would be duplicated and distributed clandestinely in universities and factories. Jacek assured us that we would be able to use the ZHP headquarters' duplicators, of course secretly at night. This was wishful thinking. This avowed oppositionist had no place in the ZHP leadership, and he not only lost his job there but also his influence. All the duplicators in communist Poland were under tight police control. For clandestine printing and distribution we had to turn elsewhere. Jacek contacted a Kraków scouting activist Krzysztof Gąsiorowski, who like Mazur had been a political prisoner under Stalinism and became a secret police informer in 1960 (code name "Klinowski"). I suggested to Jacek that we asked the Polish Trotskyites for help. There were only two of them (Kazimierz Badowski from Kraków and Ludwik Hass from Warsaw), but I knew they had a relatively new and unregistered duplicator smuggled from Belgium.[22] We asked Hass to lend it, and we had to let him read what we wanted to produce. As an orthodox Trotskyite he rejected our platform. He did not tell us this openly, but we figured out that he had no intention to help what he regarded as "revisionist scum." He passed this on to Badowski through Roman Śmiech, who traveled to Kraków and served as a courier between the two elderly gentlemen.

But Badowski had the duplicator, and he responded to Hass that although we were not Trotskyites, we were the first group in Poland to develop its own political platform "and thus cross the threshold of legality—that Rubicon beyond which only sporadic excursions had been made until now." That letter survived because Badowski forgot to burn the draft. The secret police found it during a search at his apartment and included it in the investigation materials against me and Kuroń. In any case, in early November 1964, I visited Badowski and recited our platform from memory. He gave me ninety-five duplicator stencils and promised to pass the duplicator to our courier as soon as we were ready to print. I wonder if the SB also learned about our plans and text through Hass. He himself was not in their service yet, but he maintained a close relationship with Józef Kossecki (a longtime informer code named “X”). During martial law Hass and Kossecki participated in inflammatory Polish Radio broadcasts that smeared the illegal Solidarity. I knew that the secret police had effectively infiltrated our group in 1964, but I only learned of the extent of the informer’s network against us from Andrzej Friszke’s book *Anatomia buntu*. [23]

From today’s vantage point this seems pathetic. There is no denying that our first steps in conspiracy led to abject failure. We were the victims of an understandable lack of experience and naïve trust in anyone who once had been a political prisoner, such as Mazur, Gąsiorowski, Hass, and Kossecki. It was a small consolation that we sometimes received important leaks from the supposedly professional secret police. Jacek learned, probably from Krajewski or one of his former ZMP acquaintances, that the MSW had read (and copied) some sections of our text. This suggested there was an informer within the group. Therefore Jacek and I decided to complete and print the text by ourselves. I do not know what slip-up allowed the rest of our group to figure out our plan. An argument ensued during which Andrzej Mazur accused us of disloyalty; alongside his other talents he had considerable skill as an actor. The secret police together with Mazur decided they were losing control over us, and perhaps because of that they resolved to intervene immediately. On November 14, 1964, we all were arrested, and during the searches of our apartments, the agents found the original typescript and only copy of the platform Jacek and I had prepared. This was a still draft. The stencils that I brought from Badowski survived the search. I placed them with somebody who was not involved, but after our arrest that person destroyed them.

We were not taken to a detention center but to the MSW. There were small rooms on the top floor that looked like offices with a desk, two chairs, and a couch. The door had no peephole, but when the investigating officer was not in the room, the door remained open and a militiaman paced back and forth in the corridor. The walls were not soundproof, and I could hear an investigating officer screaming at Szymon Firer (workers were always treated rudely in the country of the supposed dictatorship of the proletariat), while Szymon responded by yelling, “Dammit, tell me, am I charged with anything, am I a witness, or what?” Using hand gestures, I managed to communicate to Jacek when a militiaman was escorting us to the toilet that we would claim to be the only authors of the platform. This was true, but initially I had declared that I had written the program by myself and had not shared it with anybody, and therefore I would not talk about any other people. The next day Captain Józef Bartczak presented me with a charge from Article 155, paragraphs 1 and 2 of the prewar Penalty Code and informed me that could get up to five years in prison (which I naïvely believed) and that as a suspect I could lie. I was not going to indulge that privilege—that night I realized that it would be much better to say nothing than possibly run into contradictions. From then on I refused to answer any of the questions. Bartczak was irritated but he could not deny this was my right.

After forty-eight hours, instead of being arrested, we all were released. As I was leaving, one elderly officer told me condescendingly, “Mr. Modzelewski, all this conspiracy of yours is just bullshit.” His words hurt because I knew he was right. I did some soul searching and promised myself better.

The investigation was formally continued, but a political decision was made at the highest level not to hold a trial but rather to remove the culprits from the Party and university. This was undoubtedly better from the perspective of the Party leadership who did not want to disrupt the tranquility of the “little stabilization.” Interestingly, both the head of the KC Department of Education Andrzej Werblan and the MSW Colonels Filipiak and Bryniarski agreed on this matter.[24] Both the Party and the MSW documents have survived in the archives. Moczar was the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, and in December 1964 he became the minister, but he apparently did not try to play our case as an instrument in the struggle for power.

The task to remove Kuroń, Gomułka, Majerczyk, Chyla, and me from the Party fell on the University Party Committee. This was not entirely proper, because Jacek was not a university employee but belonged to the Żoliborz District chapter. However, he was moved to the University Base-Level Party Organization just so that the committee could execute its sentence on him. On October 27, 1964, when the University Party

Committee gathered to discuss our clandestine activities and make a decision, our colleagues' discomfort was evident. Our role was simple, and we had the luxury of being direct with them because our activities had been discovered. Jacek and I opted to be removed from the Party because we named it as the main pillar and tool of the dictatorship in our manifesto. We had declared we would fight the dictatorship, and hence the Party. But this did not make the situation any easier for our University Committee colleagues. Jacek did not hold back words bordering on cruelty: "You entered my house with the police, you confiscated my unfinished drafts, and now you want to judge me for what I think." Yet from today's perspective the position of our Party colleagues (whom Jacek and I had despairingly labeled as liberals—between ourselves, of course) and their thinking seem more interesting and deserve a deeper consideration.

For the most part they were moderate revisionists who counted on the system's gradual democratization. They saw their mission as working toward such an evolution within the Party. They also tried—sometimes successfully—to make the University Party a kind of umbrella to protect the freedom of scholarship and teaching. They were shocked by the fact that we had crossed the Rubicon and rejected the prospect of organic intraparty work, something tantamount to harming the "common good." Some of them deemed it necessary to condemn us at the University Committee meeting, while others remained silent (which was noticed by the KC Education Department and the Warsaw Committee as a disturbing symptom of a "bad atmosphere"), but of course all voted to remove us. During the meeting one of those silent people wrote me a note that puzzled me for a long time: "Karol, you know I never was against your views, but I cannot forgive your betrayal (a dreadful word, but that's what it is) of the Party." I would not have been surprised if this were written by a prewar communist who regarded the Party as the highest good, but the author was merely a few years older than I. Less than four years later she also relinquished her Party card. In her emotional message to me she expressed a common attitude among the pre-1968 moderate revisionists; on one hand, they treated the Party instrumentally, but on the other, the Party had great value for them. There was a widespread conviction that the Party was the sole assembly of rightful citizens, and only within it could one conduct effective public activity. "There is no salvation outside the

Church.” Thus our choice of breaking up with the Party was comparable not just to heresy but to apostasy—a full-fledged political parting. What remained was the ideological umbilical cord connecting us with Marxism and Marxist utopia.

We first expressed our dissent in a manifesto that was confiscated by the police. The resolution on our removal was distributed to the university departmental cells. They held meetings about this, but the members did not see what we wrote, just the report condemning us and the University Committee resolution. This caused discontent among the Party members who felt deprived of their right to information. I went to a meeting at the History Department and summarized our text in a lengthy speech. I also attended the ZMS University Committee meeting held to remove Gomułka, Chyla, and me. Once again, the attendees received the Party resolution instead of the text for which we were to be punished. So I decided that we might as well act openly and restore our manifesto as an open letter to all members of the University Party and ZMS. Jacek readily approved my idea. Because of our previous experience, we did not search for a duplicator. We prepared the manuscript in secret. I handwrote it in three copies using carbon paper, and then I typed it twice on my mother’s typewriter, each time producing an original and six onionskin copies. There were fourteen typed and three handwritten copies—not many for a text that caused such a tempest in Poland and around the world. On March 18, 1965, we submitted one copy each to the Party and the ZMS University Committees, and we distributed the rest. The next day at 6:00 in the morning we were arrested, and in July 1965, after a closed trial, the Warsaw Voivodship Court sentenced Jacek to three years in prison and me to three and a half years. This time the authorities did not think twice about putting us in prison—we left them no choice.

“According to official doctrine, we live in a socialist country. This thesis is based on the identification of state ownership of the means of production with social ownership. The act of nationalization transferred industry, transport, and banking into social property, and production relations based on social property are allegedly socialist.

“This reasoning is Marxist in appearance. In reality, an element fundamentally alien to Marxist theory has been introduced: the formal, legal meaning of ownership. State ownership can conceal various class meanings, depending on the class character of the state. [. . .]

"State ownership of the means of production is only a *form* of ownership. It is exercised by those social groups to which the state belongs. In a nationalized economic system, [. . .] political power is connected with power over the process of production and the distribution of the product.

"To whom does power belong in our state?"[25]

This was the beginning of the first chapter of our "Open Letter" titled "The Rule of Bureaucracy," which was also our ideological calling card. We castigated the ruling system as "lie-socialism" and demonstrated our attachment to socialist ideals. We were exposing the official rhetoric as "Marxist in appearance" but in fact distorting Marxism, and we stated we would employ Marxist critical analysis to show the true nature of the system.

So when we looked at who controls the so-called people's state and the nationalized means of production, we were guided by socialist values, and Marxism served as our compass. We started with the mechanisms of the monopoly of power officially called "the leadership role of the Party" and with the monolithic principles of the internal structure of a mono-party called "democratic centralism." We knew these mechanisms and principles not just from books but with our own skins, therefore our analysis was quite convincing. This was the unanimous opinion of the intellectual authorities of that time. We concluded that the "central political bureaucracy," as we called the Party-state elite of power, decided arbitrarily and with no societal oversight about "the nationalized means of production; it decided on the extent of accumulation and consumption, on the direction of investment [and] on the distribution and utilization of the entire social product."

Then we analyzed the dynamics of the GDP and real wages using official statistical data. We concluded that workers' wages in our system, as in capitalism, were related to the historically developed minimum income. Polish workers' earnings had stayed pretty much at the same very low level, with the exception of the three-year-long period of improvement connected to the weakening of the dictatorship after the 1956 political crisis. At the same time, economic growth was accompanied by development in heavy industry, which was the base of the state's military potential. This contradicted the officially declared concern for the interests of working people. We connected this to the lack of opposition, to workers being deprived of the ability to organize into independent trade unions, and to the ruthless suppression of all salary demands, especially strikes. We summarized, "The worker is thus exploited. He produces the existential minimum for himself, and the whole power of the state against himself. The product of his own labor is placed against him as an alien and hostile power, and he does not own it."

The final two sentences were a deliberate paraphrase of Marx's words on the alienation of work. Our conclusion was in the spirit of Marx—after taking over the means of production from the hands of the bourgeois, the political bureaucracy assumed the role of deposed predecessor. It was in charge of the workers' labor and product, therefore it was a new ruling class. The working class—the antagonist of the ruling bureaucracy—was on the opposite end of the social structure. The rest of society was in the orbit of the conflict between these two antagonistic classes.

We saw the harbingers of the economic and social crisis of the system, already visible in the mid-1960s. We were convinced this crisis would result in clashes between the dictatorial bureaucracy and the rebelling working class. Our reading of the statistical yearbooks (to which we assigned too much importance) and the indicators of the five-year plan prompted us to conclude that in 1966–1970 there would be a steep decline in real wages that "will force the working class to come out against the system in defense of the present level of its material and spiritual existence."

In December 1970 Kuroń and I served our second prison terms (for the "March events"). From my cell loudspeaker that broadcasted the countrywide news, I learned about the hike in food prices, the revolt in the coastal cities, and the fall of Gomułka. Soon the echoes of congratulations for our accurate predictions reached me through the thick walls of the Wołów penitentiary. I do not consider this praise justified. True prophets are cautious—they do not add a calendar to their prophesies. In our case it was not our prediction that was fulfilled but the date. The 1970 workers' revolt purged Gomułka and brought Gierek to power, caused significant changes in the authorities' policies, and its social consequences became apparent in August 1980. Yet it was not a revolution. In 1965 we were genuinely convinced that the workers' revolution was at the door, and there was an urgent need to create a programmatic perspective and a vision for its political organization.

Alongside the revelatory analysis of the system and the diagnosis of its increasing inefficiency, we included a program—or utopia if you wish—about the most important institutions of the future workers' democracy that would emerge from the ruins of the fallen dictatorship.

Naturally our program started with the same issue that was the turning point in the reversal of the Polish October 1956 revolution—factory workers' self-governance. We advocated the transfer of administration in factories to workers' councils combined with the independence of companies. The central planning and the command-and-quota system were to be abolished, and the national economy was to be directed through market mechanisms combined with instruments of economic intervention. This shows the influence of the 1957 Prime Minister's Economic Council reform program, never implemented, or perhaps the Yugoslavian model. For us the need to emancipate factory workers was the most important thing—not the ideas of the economists or the experiences of past economic reforms. We wrote, "If he [the worker] were to remain a slave in his place of work, then any freedom outside the place of work would soon become 'Sunday freedom,' fictitious freedom."

We also proposed the creation of a countrywide body representing factory crews, that is, a central council of workers' delegates to make crucial decisions about the national economy. "If these central decisions were to remain outside the influence of the working class, it would not rule over the product that it has created and over its own labor," we wrote with the steel logic of visionaries. "Workers' self-rule, limited to the level of the enterprise, would inevitably become fictitious and a cover for the power of management in the factory and for the rule of a new technocratic bureaucracy."

We were aware that no democracy, including a workers' democracy, is possible in a mono-party system. Therefore we proposed pluralism, that is, the unlimited freedom to create political parties; the abolition of censorship and all limitations on the freedom of speech, print, and assembly; and full freedom to pursue scholarly research and artistic creation. Thus we augmented our anarcho-syndicalist project of the state of workers' councils with the liberal pattern of citizens' liberties drawn from Western democracies. However, we were skeptical about parliament. We emphasized that in the 1930s it could not prevent the transformation of Poland's Second Republic into an authoritarian state.[26] In our vision, parliament was to play a secondary role because the power over the economy was ascribed to a system of councils.

However, the workers should also have the means to defend themselves against these councils and the state. As we wrote, this would be secured by "trade unions completely independent of the state and with the right to organize economic and political strikes." I remember with satisfaction that this sentence was quoted in the November 1980 secret memo by Poland's General Prosecutor Lucjan Czubiński that laid out the guidelines for law enforcement agencies in combating the threat of counter-revolution.[27]

Finally we proposed the complete dissolution of the political police, and effectively the regular army. Only the air force, rocket units, and the navy and highly specialized units of technologically advanced armament that required highly trained personnel were to remain. All the rest, that is, the infantry and what constitutes the core of the army today, would be replaced with a universal workers' militia. Our motivation was that the regular army "is separated from society in order that it may, more easily, be directed against society." Such an army easily could be used for the bloody suppression of mass protests (we brought up the 1956 Poznań events) or for a coup d'état. As long as the armed forces were organized as a regular army, "a clique of generals may always prove stronger than all the parties and councils."

Readers of the "Open Letter" from the 1960s intelligentsia distanced themselves from our programmatic ideas, but they largely shared our critique of the system. The Marxist language did not bother them. Unlike today, at that time subversive thoughts could reach a reader more easily when formulated in Marxist terms. I even find it hard to read my own words from a half century ago. I feel offended by our doctrinarism. Yet I know that the revisionism, that is, a heretical variety of Marxism, is not only an important part of my personal biography but also a link in our common history.

The communist system was based on force and fear, but in the long run it could not exist without governing minds. The cooperation of public intellectuals was a necessary prerequisite for the system's stability. For a long time this requirement was met. Today's authors largely do not hide their outrage about the intellectuals of that time. But their cries of horror about communist Poland demonstrate not so much their high moral standards as their lack of historical knowledge and imagination. The leading personalities of Polish intellectual life supported communism not only out of cowardly servility but also out of conviction. During the first twenty years of communist Poland, communist ideological domination was a fact. Those who shaped Poland's intellectual landscape spoke the Marxist language. The generations brought up after the war knew no other language for public matters. The language of the right was absent in public life for twenty years; it needed revitalization and was useless in the changed reality. One could repeat prewar rightist slogans, but it was impossible to address the challenges of the new epoch with that defunct communication mode. Dissent needed to be expressed in a language spoken by intellectuals and understood by youth.

Class rule was a key concept in Marxism. This notion was used to justify the communist system of power in the official ideology and propaganda. The existence of privileges and disadvantages was played down, and the subjection of the people was considered a necessary defense against Western capitalism. Class rule by the exploiters was considered the worst thing of all, and the nationalization of factories and banks put an end to it. Once private property of the means of production was abolished, no inequality or oppression had the character of class dominance anymore. Today we see this as mere sophistry, or a crude trick, but during my youth it effectively prevented dissent.

Milovan Djilas was the first to lift that linguistic taboo of new speech. In his mid-1950s book he erased the equation between the abolition of private property and class. Without going into sociological subtleties, Djilas simply stated that political bureaucracy in communist-governed countries "governs and uses the state means of production," and thus is their owner, that is, a new ruling class. In our "Open Letter" we tried to substantiate

Djilas's idea. We were also inspired by Stanisław Ossowski's 1957 book *Class Structure in the Social Consciousness*. The great Polish sociologist noted that the criteria of class division vary relative to the historical changes in social relations. The criterion of legal ownership of the means of production reflects the social order of nineteenth-century capitalism and does not necessarily apply to earlier or later systems. In our own time, power plays a much more important role, especially when it turns into omnipotence monopolized by one social group.

The reasoning that political bureaucracy replaced the bourgeoisie as the new ruling class in communist countries hit at the very heart because it delegitimized communism on the grounds of its own ideology. The political system turned out to be faux socialism. Its claims that it was better than Western democracies because it was free of exploitation and implemented social justice proved to be ordinary lies. After dismantling the propaganda cover-up, a picture emerged of a particularly ruthless exploitation unmitigated by citizens' liberties and the freedom of unions and a uniquely brutal oppression implemented by a tyrannical dictatorship. This was still within the realm of revisionism as we were rebelling in defense of values declared in theory even if trampled in practice. Yet this was the most radical version of revisionism. It was no longer about repairing the system but overthrowing it. There is no small difference between "repair" and "overthrow."

Even worse, we appealed to the working class, convinced they had the power to overthrow the rule of bureaucracy and bury the system. From the perspective of the ruling mono-party, this particularly hurt as the Party claimed to be the avant-garde of the working class. It supported its own legitimacy with this claim while being deathly afraid of workers' rebellions. Three and a half years in prison may seem incommensurate with fourteen typescript pages. However, considering the content, for that system, I regard it an almost measured reaction. But Polish communism was much milder than its Soviet prototype.

When we wrote that the working class would overthrow the system, we were prophesying. Today we must ask if this prophecy was fulfilled. In the scope of the entire Soviet empire—the most appropriate scale to consider this question—the answer must be negative, especially for the Soviet Union. I only know about the workers' rebellion in Novocherkask in

1961. As in Poznań in 1956, the army in Novocherkask shot at the striking workers on the streets. But nothing comparable occurred later, especially during perestroika. The Soviet empire fell apart as a result of an attempt at modernization and liberalization by Gorbachev. The decentralist trends in the republics played an important role, as did Yanayev's coup that was to save the empire but effectively finished it off. The collapse of communism in the Soviet Union caused its end in the satellite countries.

Earlier under Khrushchev's de-Stalinization there was a great workers' revolt in the GDR that took the form of a general strike and street demonstrations in East Berlin that were crushed by the Soviets. Workers also played an important role in Hungary in October and November 1956, but at that time the fate of the Hungarian revolution was predetermined. It was bloodily sealed by the Soviet invasion.

Against this background Poland constantly remained the weakest link in the Soviet empire. From 1956 mass social protests occurred every few years, and in spite of threats and preparations, the Soviet Union never intervened militarily. Except for March 1968, it was primarily industrial workers who stood up to the Party and skirmished with the militia and the army. This was the case in Poznań in June 1956, as well as in Gdańsk, Gdynia, Szczecin, and Elbląg in December 1970, and in Radom, Ursus, and Płock in June 1976. This was also the case for the great strikes that engulfed Poland in July and August 1980, the 1980–1981 Solidarity revolution, the December 1981 strikes against martial law, and the May and August 1988 strikes. These last strikes were much weaker than those in 1981; nonetheless the ruling generals saw them as a warning. In the new international situation these strikes contributed to the authorities' decision to seek a compromise with the opposition.

While our prediction of a workers' revolution failed to transpire for the entire Soviet empire, the events in Poland seemed to confirm it. Yet the "Open Letter" had no direct impact on the rebelling workers for the simple reason that it never reached them. Between August 1980 and December 1981 when I met workers active in Solidarity, I never encountered a hint of familiarity with our text from fifteen years earlier. I neither pursued this nor tried to republish the "Open Letter" as an uncensored union publication. I did not want to advocate the overthrow of the system, despite the fact that just before martial law the government propaganda accused me precisely of this. Some workers may have heard of our manifesto because it was broadcast in installments by Radio Free Europe in 1966; however, no matter how popular radio is, it cannot substitute for a careful reading of a text.

The publication of the "Open Letter" in the West was due to young people from Adam Michnik's circle. It was published in Polish in August 1966 by Jerzy Giedroyc's Instytut Literacki in Paris. Subsequently it reached the intelligentsia in Poland who read the Paris-based journal *Kultura*, in particular a small number of public intellectuals critical of the system. Many of them collaborated in the 1970s with the Committee for the Defense of Workers KOR, and even more later actively participated in Solidarity. In 1980–1981 this social movement was infused with the idea of forging a brotherhood between intelligentsia and workers. If Kuroń and my 1964–1965 writings had any impact on the attitudes of *Kultura* readers toward the largest workers' movement in Polish history, then our efforts and imprisonment were not in vain. But the true lasting impact remains an open question.

The "Open Letter" was better known abroad than in Poland. I saw the French, Italian, German, Swedish, and Japanese translations; however, there were many others, such as ones in Czech and English. The "Letter" was issued largely, if not exclusively, by short-lived publishers of the radical left between 1966 and 1968. This was a time of youthful rebellion in Europe and America. The participants were rebelling against the conformism of bourgeois societies but equally against their bureaucratized communist parties with their Mecca in Moscow. This manifesto by two rebellious Marxists from Warsaw was met with great interest and sympathy. When young Daniel Cohn-Bendit stood up in court (I am not sure if it was in France or Germany), he proudly answered the judge's question, "What is your name?" with, "Kuroń Modzelewski."[28] Naturally the judge did not understand, and "Danny the Red" had to explain. The "Open Letter" addressed to the members of the Warsaw University Party and ZMS cells was a must-read for young people who in 1968 and 1969 were erecting barricades in university towns across Western Europe. I was jealous—why was it so popular there, but not in Poland?

Our 1968 left-wing readers took many different paths. Some remained within the framework of democracy, but others went down the path of violence, although I never encountered any terrorists. However, by pure chance in Italy I met some people who were prepared to use a softcore violence in their struggle for their ideals. They called themselves "Autonomists."[29] For them this was not about national or territorial autonomy but independence of action. The "Autonomists" differed from the Red Brigades primarily by their methods—instead of revolvers they used bike chains. In October 1978 the Polish authorities graciously released my passport for a private tourist visit to Italy. For three weeks I toured Italian universities lecturing on the Italian Middle Ages. This trip was connected with the publication of my habilitation dissertation by the Storia d'Italia publishing house.[30] My visit occurred at the same time as a protest by student organizations. A meeting of student representatives in Pisa had been broken up—not by the police but by the "Autonomists" who could not stand that a representative of the young branch of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) was allowed to speak. With the battle cry, "No freedom for revisionists" (that is, the PCI conciliators), the "Autonomists" grabbed bike chains hidden in their jackets and turned the auditorium into a battlefield. I was in Padua, but I heard about this from the students after they returned from Pisa.

In Padua I delivered a lecture on the 643 CE Lombard laws. An Italian-Latin inscription spray-painted on the opposite wall of the university hall read, "Sporo ergo sum." In Italian *sporo* means "I shoot." "I shoot" instead of "I think." To this day I do not know if the intention of that post-Cartesian inscription was ironic or in praise of terrorism. Perhaps the ambiguity was deliberate or possibly meant as a joke.

From Padua I went on a sentimental journey to nearby Venice. I spent a year there once on scholarship, and I wanted to go back to relive memories from my youth. My friends connected me with my host, a young Venetian woman who lived in a four-room apartment with her fiancé. He was about thirty, unshaven, with long hair, and dressed in a studied shabby-chic manner. It was obvious he came from a rich bourgeois family and had very left-wing views. The day after I arrived, he asked me where I had learned Italian so well. I told him that seventeen years earlier I had spent a year in Italy.

“And then what happened?”

“I couldn’t come back to Italy.”

“Why not?”

“I didn’t have a passport.”

“Why not?”

“I clashed with the authorities.”

“About what?”

“A friend and I wrote an open letter to the communist party.”

The young man became interested.

“Are you Kuroń?”

“No.”

“So you’re Modzelewski!”

I said I was.

“Man, this is fantastic! You have to come with me, I am meeting some friends in a bar around the corner. They’ll be thrilled.”

In the bar around the corner, there were three young men—also about thirty, long haired, and sloppily dressed.

“Guys, this is Karol Modzelewski!” my host announced. The group greeted me with a loud “wow!” and immediately showered me with questions about the “Open Letter.” It seemed they had studied it thoroughly and knew it inside out. Despite myself, I felt a surge of pride. Moved that I was surrounded by such an enthusiastic, if small, circle of listeners, I answered their questions, and then I asked if they belonged to any particular organization.

They started to explain, “You know, there is a new movement in Italy called Autonomism . . .”

I knew. I felt as if someone had pierced a balloon inside me, and my pride started to deflate. Man shoots, but God carries the bullets. Sometimes they miss their mark.

NOTES

1. Trans. Nicholas Bethell.

2. The Twentieth Congress of the CPSU was held between February 14 and 25, 1956, in Moscow; Khrushchev's speech "On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences" was delivered on the last day of the congress.

3. Józef Światło (1915–1994) was a high-ranking officer of the Polish Ministry of Public Security who in 1953 defected to the West. Subsequently he worked for the CIA and Radio Free Europe, where he broadcast a cycle, "Behind the Scenes of the Security Apparatus and the Party" (Polish: "Za kulisami bezpieki i partii").

4. In his "Poem for Adults," Ważyk depicted a grim reality of life in Stalinist Poland and the falsehood of propaganda. The poem was first published in the journal *Nowa Kultura* on September 21, 1955.

5. Tadeusz Manteuffel-Szoege (1902–1970) was a historian specializing in medieval Europe. Stanisław Herbst (1907–1973) was a modern historian specializing in modern military history and the history of urban centers, especially of Warsaw. Stefan Kieniewicz (1907–1992) was a historian and archival scholar specializing in the nineteenth century. Marian Małowist (1909–1988) was a historian of the economic history of Europe. His wife Iza Bieżuńska-Małowist (1917–1995) was a classical historian. Witold Kula (1916–1988) was a socioeconomic historian.

6. Aleksander Gieysztor (1916–1999) was a historian of medieval Poland.

7. Henryk Samsonowicz (b. 1930) is a historian specializing in medieval Poland. In 1989–1990, he served as the Minister of Education in the government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki. Antoni Mączak (1928–2003) was a historian of early modern and modern Poland.

8. Józef Cyrankiewicz (1911–1989) was a prewar socialist and after 1948 a communist politician. He served as the prime minister of the People's Republic of Poland between 1947 and 1952 and then from 1954 to 1970.

9. Krzysztof Pomian, see chapter 1, note 37; Andrzej Garlicki (1935–2013) was a historian of modern Poland; Bogdan Jankowski (b. 1938) is an electrical engineer.

10. *Po Prostu* was a social-literary journal published in Warsaw between 1947 and 1955 and then briefly restored in 1990–1991. From 1955 it was an organ of the ZMP and had a subtitle "A Journal of Students and Young Intelligentsia" and was an important public forum. The journal was closed down by the authorities on October 2, 1957. It became one of the symbols of the Polish October.

11. Leszek Kołakowski (1927–2009) was a philosopher and historian of ideas. Exiled from Poland in 1968, he taught mostly in Great Britain. “Czym jest socjalizm?” (“What Is Socialism?”) was Kołakowski’s tongue-in-cheek manifesto written in 1956 for the journal *Po Prostu* and banned by the censors. It was a list of what socialism was not.
12. Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński (1901–1981) was the primate of Poland from 1948. He was arrested and detained on Church premises in different locations between 1953 and 1956.
13. Before becoming a world-renowned reformer of theater, Jerzy Grotowski (1933–1999) was active in the Party and its youth organizations; he was a PZPR member until its dissolution in 1990.
14. Adam Rapacki (1909–1970) was an economist, politician, and diplomat; between 1956 and 1968 he served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Stefan Żółkiewski (1911–1991) was a historian of literature and a politician; between 1956 and 1959 he served as the Minister of Higher Education.
15. Eugeniusz Noworyta (b. 1936) is a Polish diplomat. Zdzisław Kuksewicz (b. 1930) is a philosopher and historian of medieval philosophy.
16. “Walter’s Circle” (Polish: Krąg Walterowski) is a youth organization created in 1954, so called after the pseudonym of Polish communist hero General Karol Świerczewski. It was also referred to as the “Walterites” (Polish: Walterowcy).
17. Aleksander Smolar (b. 1940) is a writer and political activist. In the wake of the March events he emigrated to the West (in 1971) where he established a journal, *Aneks*, and served as the spokesperson for KOR. Włodzimierz Brus (1921–2007) was an economist and Party apparatchik in Poland. He emigrated from Poland in 1972 in the wake of the 1968 anti-Semitic campaign.
18. Stanisław Gomułka (b. 1940, no relation to Władysław Gomułka) is an economist and physician; Waldemar Kuczyński (b. 1939) is an economist and journalist; Ryszard Bugaj (b.1944) is an economist and politician; Stefan Meller (1942–2008) was a historian and diplomat.
19. Anatol Lawina (1940–2006) was an opposition activist.
20. Jan Detko (1931–1979) was a literary scholar specializing in Polish literature of the late nineteenth century.
21. The Confederation for Independent Poland (Polish: Konfederacja Polski Niepodległej, KPN) was a right-leaning pro-independence political party

established in 1979.

22. Kazimierz Badowski (1907–1990) was communist activist and a leading Polish Trotskyist, founder of the International Revolutionary Current. Ludwik Hass (1918–2008) was a historian of Freemasonry in Poland.

23. Andrzej Friszke, *Anatomia buntu: Kuroń, Modzelewski i komandosi* (Kraków: Znak, 2010).

24. Andrzej Werblan (b. 1924) was a longtime communist politician and Party dignitary. In 2017 he and Karol Modzelewski published a volume of conversations about the history of the People's Poland: Karol Modzelewski, Andrzej Werblan, and Robert Walenciak, *Polska Ludowa* (Warszawa: Iskry, 2017).

25. Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski, "An Open Letter to the Party," *New Politics* (Spring 1966): 5–46, http://www.unz.org/Pub/NewPolitics-1966q2-00005 and (Summer 1966): 72–100, http://www.unz.org/Pub/NewPolitics-1966q3-00072.

26. There is no established formal enumeration of Polish republics in historiography. The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century republic of the nobles, or the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, is regarded as the first Polish republic. The Second Republic, or interwar Poland, refers to the state of Poland between World War I and World War II (1918–1939). The term the Third Republic was used in the 1997 Polish Constitution to denote Poland after the transition from communism in 1989. The Fourth Republic is a political slogan first employed at the end of the 1990s by right-wing journalists to criticize the essentials of the legal and political system of the Third Republic and forward demands for fundamental changes.

27. General Lucjan Czubiński (b. 1930) was the Public Prosecutor General (Polish: Prokurator Generalny) of Poland (1972–1981) and the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs (1983–1990).

28. Daniel Cohn-Bendit (b. 1945) was one of the student leaders during the May 1968 protests in Paris. The referenced trial was held in Paris in 1968.

29. Autonomism, or autonomist Marxism, is a cluster of antiauthoritarian left-wing political and social movements and theories that emerged in Italy in the 1960s.

30. Karol Modzelewski, *Dal feudalesimo al capitalismo* (Torino: Einaudi, 1978). Storia d'Italia is Einaudi's imprint.

Chapter 4

The Right of Self-Defense

> For such an act, some rogue begins
> To sweep the colleges away—
> To call the students Jacobins
> And all your young men’s hopes betray.
> —Adam Mickiewicz, *Forefathers’ Eve*, part III[1]

When I was in prison, a prisoner serving time was entitled to one half-hour visit. The visitor had to be listed on the so-called correspondence card that entitled the prisoner to write and receive letters (two a month for a first-time offender—of course these letters were censored). The visits usually took place in a so-called streetcar with a long table with a vertical barrier in the middle. Prisoners sat in a row on one side, and visitors sat on the other side. At the head of the table in a high chair was a warden who oversaw the whole thing. During a visit in October 1966 in the Barczewo penitentiary, my then wife, Bogna, managed to whisper to me that there had been a stormy meeting of students with Leszek Kołakowski and Krzysztof Pomian at Warsaw University’s History Department.[2] After the meeting a petition was started calling for the authorities to release Jacek Kuroń and me. Bogna also told me that Adam Michnik had been summoned before the university disciplinary commission as the organizer of the meeting, and about Solidarity actions on his behalf. I asked, “So now are they all on a secret police watch list?” I did not need to ask, this was obvious. But from then on I had much more luxurious visits that took place in a separate room with a table and three chairs—for myself, the visitor, and the prison guard captain who supervised our meetings (the deputy head of the security detachment in Barczewo). He noted every word and gesture.

I could not sleep because of Bogna’s news, which implied that our young political friends were openly challenging the authorities. They were ignoring prohibitions and coercion and acting as if they lived in a free country, not a watched closely police state. At the university they pretty much could express themselves publicly—until they were expelled. But by doing this they were unable to do much clandestinely outside of the university, that is, reach factory workers, which was the most important thing to do. The secret police would not let them out of their sight. So I decided to let my friends know what I thought.

I wrote a message on a small piece of paper in order to hide it more easily and to pass it during a visit. My “kite” was short and to the point.[3] I wrote “We [that is, Kuroń and I—K. M.] want a real opposition, not a just salon.” This bordered on insult but was succinct. Even today it makes my hair stand on end when I think what I did. With my authority (and I knew I had it) I was pushing these young people on a thorny conspiratorial path. But they did not listen. Unlike the Russian Narodniks, they were not convinced that “going among the people” was the most important thing.[4]

I did not know when my next visit would be, so I hid my “kite” in a crack in the sole of my slipper. I knew that they examined slippers during searches but not the soles. One day a warden opened my cell door and announced, “Get ready for a visit.” I took the “kite” out of my sole and put it in a matchbox. The visit was with my mother, and we had the luxurious setting mentioned earlier. The captain clicked his heels, saluted, and kissed my mother’s hand (for him she was the widow of a distinguished builder of the People’s Poland).[5] I was quite amused by this gallantry because he addressed prisoners, including me, rather rudely. We sat down. There was an ashtray on the table. My mother reached for her “Giewont,” and I for my “Sport.”[6] I was faster with the matches, and I lit her cigarette and then my own. Then I pushed the matchbox toward her as if it was hers. My mother was a Soviet woman hardened by many visits in Stalinist prisons and lagers. She looked me deep in the eyes, took the matchbox, and put it in her pocket. The captain did not notice.

My “kite” made its recipients laugh: “Ha-ha, Karol thinks we should not protest openly but go quietly with the ‘Open Letter’ to the working class” (this was how Irena Lasota described it to me later).[7] These opinions were aired in bugged apartments. The gallant captain from Barczewo was apparently admonished for his lack of vigilance because at the end of the next visit he mumbled, “I am sorry” with a fake smile, and then proceeded to search my mother’s sleeves. But this time there was no “kite.” My mother looked at him with her innocent blue eyes and said, “Sir, I am an honest woman.”

I left prison on August 3, 1967, on a so-called conditional release. I would have just seven months of freedom, but these were important months. I soon found that my “kite” reflected my ignorance. There was an opposition circle at the university, and it was cohesive and able to initiate actions even if it consisted of several informal groups linked by social ties. These people had been “sounding off” already for a while and would not be able to reach other social circles inconspicuously (even if they wanted) because the SB was watching them closely. At the university the political and police authorities tried to scare them, but these repressions were hardly effective. The dissidents were protected by the mechanisms of university autonomy and the ethos of the Polish intelligentsia that prompted the faculty to recognize the line between reasonable caution and shameful servility.

I had the opportunity to learn what that ethos meant from my mentor Aleksander Gieysztor, to whom Tadeusz Manteuffel said in 1945, “Now we are no longer fighting partisans, we are building a University.” Gieysztor adhered to this rule, although in 1964 he signed the “Letter of 34” intellectuals against the tightening of censorship. But he was past the time of romantic fighting of the German occupation and the 1944 Warsaw Uprising. When on March 18, 1965, I handed him a copy of the “Open Letter,” my mentor, who alas had not taught me the rules of conspiracy, told me to come back in three hours and locked himself in his office. When I returned, he handed me back the text and told me that he had read it with great interest and that I would only be at large until the next morning at the latest (he was right). He said nothing about the text itself, but I figured he was skeptical. Gieysztor did not believe in communism, so he could not be a heretic of that faith. But he understood the historical importance of heresies, and he knew that rebellious thinking always sprouts in the soil of a fertile culture. To him I was a part of the “substance” that he was to protect. When I was arrested, he visited Minister of Justice Stanisław Walczak, previously a Warsaw University law professor.[8] Gieysztor addressed him as a colleague: “My doctoral student is in prison—

something under your jurisdiction—and I need to see him in my capacity as his advisor."

This was an excessive request for a communist country, but the minister consented. Perhaps he was following the unwritten ethical code of academics, or perhaps he knew that although he would be minister for another year or two, he would be an academic for the rest of his life and would rather cross Gomułka than Gieysztor. Kuroń's advisor, Bogdan Suchodolski, followed Gieysztor's example and obtained a similar privilege.[9] Because of this, the myth developed that we wrote our dissertations in prison—which would have been physically impossible. I would have needed dozens of volumes accessible only in a good research library. Additionally, in Barczewo where I was from November 1965, there were six prisoners to a cell of nine square meters. Four prisoners slept in two bunk beds, and two "on the hay," that is, straw mattresses stored under the bunks during the day. A loudspeaker was always playing, and I could not turn it off for an extended period because my cellmates wanted some noise to drown their gloomy thoughts. To Gieysztor (and me) it was important to show that the principles of academia were binding regardless of the circumstances. He also did not want me to completely waste my time. He visited me once in Mokotów prison, and then he went to Barczewo in the freezing cold but was not admitted. Some zealous informer told Gomułka about this, and "Comrade Wiesław" was outraged and ordered the visitations to be revoked. Gieysztor again went to see Walczak, who agreed that although advisor and student would no longer meet, they could correspond. It was difficult for the authorities to fight against the attitudes, persistence, and social position of prominent scholars.

On November 3, 1965, the university disciplinary proceedings started against the students who were accused of possessing and sharing politically incorrect publications, expressing solidarity with Jacek Kuroń and me in the district court during our trial, and collecting money to aid to our families. The accused were: Adam Michnik, Wiktor Nagórski, Eugeniusz Chyla, Seweryn Blumsztajn, Maciej Czechowski, Jan Szczytt-Niemirowicz, Ryszard Mojsiewicz, and Włodzimierz Molski. The first four were to be expelled from the university. This was demanded openly without any pretense by Party authorities and the secret police. The rector acquiesced, but according to higher education law, the decision was actually the university's discipline committee's. Its chairman, prominent lawyer Andrzej Murzynowski, was not willing to bend.[10] Moreover, according to the rules, the proceedings were to be open to the public, and the accused had the right to select their advocates from among the faculty. Prominent professors, including some celebrities, agreed to serve. Maria Ossowska represented Eugeniusz Chyla, and the logician Henryk Greniewski (substituting for Witold Kula, who was abroad) defended Seweryn Blumsztajn.[11] Zygmunt Bauman represented Maciej Czechowski. During the proceedings, professors Iza Bieżuńska-Małowist, Ewa Wipszycka, and Andrzej Garlicki testified in favor of the accused, and Włodzimierz Brus and eminent lawyer Leszek Kubicki spoke against the disciplinary measures.[12] Tadeusz Kotarbiński and Czesław Bobrowski attended the sentencing.[13] In the end, Michnik, Chyla, and Nagórski were suspended for a year; Blumsztajn, Czechowski, and Szczytt-Niemirowicz received reprimands; and Mojsiewicz and Molski were acquitted.[14] No one was expelled. The Party leadership and the MSW did not get their way; the obstacle turned out to be the faculty exercising their legal rights. As Andrzej Friszke noted shrewdly, "In this case at stake was not just the right of the students to express views unacceptable to the authorities, but also the autonomy of the university defending itself against police intrusion and the Party's commands."

Learning from their defeat, the Party leadership decided "to direct the Ministry of Higher Education to simplify the regulations on disciplinary procedures, and to abolish long and tedious disciplinary processes." This was the first step toward ending the autonomy of universities. This step was easy because the disciplinary commission rules were introduced by ministerial decree and could be changed without amending higher education law. These changes were soon implemented by the minister, but academia responded with an outcry. When the authorities made yet another attempt to expel Michnik using the new draconian disciplinary rules, a petition to the rector turned out to be an effective countermeasure. It pointed out that a student could not be expelled for remarks at an official meeting organized with the permission of the university. The petition was signed by 1,037 students and 128 faculty members. This time, too, the intentions of the police and the authorities fell short.

Each signature was an act of civil disobedience that required substantial courage. The number of signatures demonstrated that the attempts at repression had only increased the openly defiant attitudes in academia, something previously limited to small groups. The authorities could not afford this. Michnik again was suspended for a year, but he remained at the university. Indeed, the petition enjoyed the inconspicuous but undeniable support of a large, or even prevailing, number of the faculty. Vice Rector Zygmunt Rybicki (later a longtime rector appointed in March 1968) was well known for his eagerness in cooperating with the secret police and the Party.[15] He demanded that the director of the Institute of Mathematics, Stanisław Mazur, fire Dr. Włodzimierz Holsztyński for circulating the petition among the faculty. Mazur responded, “Petition means plea in Polish, and the university does not punish anyone for presenting a plea” (quoted from Friszke’s *Anatomia buntu*).

When Jacek and I were conditionally released from prison, it was clear that the policy of the leadership of communist Poland was on a collision course with autonomy in higher education. Since the end of 1967 or the beginning of 1968, there had been rumors in the academic community about a new law that aimed to end this. But for the time being there was a fragile armistice. The authorities still tolerated the dissident youth groups within the university sandbox, but any attempt to move the opposition activity beyond that would trigger repressions and the violent crushing of the opposition. We knew this since April 1963, when university discussion club activist Marek Kordos was arrested after giving a lecture in the Alfa discussion club at Warsaw Polytechnic University. He was held for three months despite protests and faculty interventions.

Therefore, after our release we no longer suggested that the university dissidents try to organize opposition among workers. Eugeniusz Chyla had planned something similar in the Warsaw ZRK radio factory previously, but he gave up. This was fortunate because his closest associate was an SB secret informer code named “Żelisław.” Collaboration between the independent intelligentsia and the workers in a police state with totalitarian roots could not come about the same way as in the nineteenth century. Like the 1968 student revolutionaries in Western Europe, the "Paratroopers" used the language of Marxism and the symbols of the left. But in fact the "Paratroopers" directed their message to their peers, that is, the university, and they became the harbingers of the rebellion of the intelligentsia. Their zeal needed to be constrained rather than fueled. The autonomy of Polish universities lasted for almost twelve years and became a culturally fertile ecological niche within an authoritarian surrounding. But this led to the emergence of political opposition only within Warsaw University. The communist dictatorship could tolerate university autonomy but not opposition. Therefore the rebels needed to be cautious. Combining rebellion with restraint is like combining water and fire. Jacek and I left prison as heroes, and naturally we became their leaders. We felt responsible for what would happen to these young people. As a result, we —natural-born rebels—had to solve this conundrum.

We went beyond the university for the first time at the end of January 1968 because of the ban on performances of Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve*. The ban was unprecedented, and it could not be left unanswered. Three uncoordinated initiatives emerged independently: an audience protest during the last performance, a demonstration at the entrance to the theater, and a petition to the Sejm. I contributed to the first, but even if I had been against the protests, I could neither have stopped the demonstration of the theater school students organized by Andrzej Seweryn and Małgorzata Dziewulska at Theater Square nor the petition. In any case, I supported them both unreservedly. Separately, a group of prominent writers called an extraordinary general meeting of the Warsaw chapter of the Union of Polish Writers. By banning *Forefathers' Eve*, the authorities sent the public intellectuals an offer impossible to refuse—an invitation to clash head on. The response was predictable.

Signatures for the petition to the Sejm primarily came from Warsaw University and a few other Warsaw colleges. Maciej Czechowski collected signatures in his hometown of Wrocław. In Warsaw 3,145 people signed the petition, and 1,170 in Wrocław. Actually there were more signatures, but the secret police and Party activists managed to confiscate and destroy some petitions. Apparently we crossed the line with this action. The "flyer war" was also a new thing. The ZMS board at the university Philosophy

Department posted a resolution that condemned and belittled the petition by presenting it as “the work of a small group of troublemakers.” We responded with a flyer titled “The political sense behind the *Forefathers’ Eve* petition” posted on the university buildings. Our opponents responded with an anonymous rhymed anti-Semitic flyer that we countered with an “Against fascist provocation” flyer. We responded to the police, administrative, and disciplinary repressions with a flyer, “Citizens’ rights threatened again,” written by Jakub Karpiński.[16] Its language was new—it foreshadowed the evolution from Marxism to liberalism of many among the March 1968 circle. It also unambiguously referred to the Prague Spring.

The conflict escalated from more or less spontaneous protest after the last performance of *Forefathers’ Eve*, to the petition action and flyer war, and then to a mass rally. Both Jacek and I were conscious that the rally meant crossing another barrier, which was psychologically very important to the authorities, especially because the rally would have to be illegal and held in the open. In their eyes this was dangerous—a crowd that could move to the streets and provoke violence. In Gomułka’s inner circle this prospect surely produced fear and the readiness to respond with violence and could result in the decision to eliminate the youths’ opposition groups by sending them to prison. We both regarded such a turn of events likely, and we wanted to avoid a disaster. But our young friends felt differently. Stirred up by the fight, they insisted on a rally. Many (but not the majority) grew up in households of prewar communists. As Andrzej Friszke correctly noted, they were not afraid of the communist state, even if intellectually they regarded it as repressive.

I remember a late night conversation between Jacek Kuroń, Adam Michnik, and me in Saski Park at the end of February 1968. Jacek tried to persuade Adam that a rally would result in arrests, trials, and prison sentences for the most active “Paratroopers,” as well as in eliminating the enclave of relative political freedom at the university. Adam could not believe this.

“You’re kidding! You think they’ll lock us up? With prison sentences? For what, on what grounds?”

Jacek explained with the patience of a teacher.

"Not because of what we are doing, but for what they want out of this, and because of who we are. But I can tell you for what—for being an illegal organization."

Jacek predicted this correctly, but Adam was not convinced.

"What organization? There are no grounds!"

"Adam, tell me—wasn't there a petition? Somebody had to edit it, make copies, circulate them, collect signatures, and then deliver them. Somebody had to send them to the speaker of the parliament so that the secret police did not intercept them, and they were able to reach their destination. And what about the flyers? Somebody wrote them, typed them, and posted them on boards and walls. How many people had to get together and coordinate to do all of this? So there you have it—an organization."

"But that's nonsense! In this way any collective action could be an organization. We don't have membership or a structure. Unless they break someone and dictate what they want during interrogation."

Jacek looked at our young friend from the height of his experience and nodded.

"Yes Adam, they will break more than one person, you will see."

Yet in spite of his flawless reasoning, Jacek began to waver under the pressure of the "Paratroopers'" enthusiasm. He was not sure if we had the right to stop them from proving themselves, something they greatly desired. But I insisted that we were responsible for them, as well as for everything that could be destroyed. We had a meeting at which for the first and only time we decided to vote—as if we were indeed an organization. The young ones wanted a rally to protest the ban on *Forefathers' Eve* and to support the writers.[17] I was against this and presented more or less the same argument as Jacek in our conversation with Adam. Now Jacek was quiet and did not even hint that he was wavering. The majority adopted my position not so much out of conviction as in recognition of our authority as leaders. But it turned out that we delayed the confrontation only by nine days.

Jacek Kuroń's thirty-fourth birthday was on March 3, 1968. There was a custom among the "Paratroopers" to hold a kind of discussion club on birthdays or name days at that person's place. This was called a "political salon," an ironic allusion to the phrase from my "kite." This time Kuroń was to deliver a lecture on the "messianism of the working class." Jacek wanted to make one more desperate attempt to convert our young admirers to our class faith. I was about to leave my apartment when a distressed Krzysztof Pomian appeared and asked me to come out to the street. Leszek Kołakowski was waiting in front of the house. They both were anxious because they had heard a rumor that we would call for a rally at the university. I calmed them down and told them about the decision not to have a rally unless we were forced to by some new drastic moves by the authorities. They both thought that unfortunately such moves were quite likely, but we should not act prematurely and provoke the authorities.

I arrived at Kuroń's late, and there were already more than thirty people there. In the hallway, Adam Michnik whispered to me that on the request of the Minister of Higher Education, the rector had expelled him and Henryk Szlajfer. This happened just like that—without a disciplinary commission and without hearing from the accused. Neither the law on higher education nor the executive regulations tied to it (including the rules for disciplinary procedures amended a few months earlier) gave the rector the prerogative. There was no longer any question about provoking the authorities—they had come to us. They decided to use repression outside the law, completely arbitrarily. This was confirmed on March 6 by university Vice Rector Zygmunt Rybicki at the general assembly of the University Party cell. To a question from the floor about the unusual mode of Michnik and Szlajfer's expulsion, Rybicki answered, "I consider this decision an exception, but I will treat it as a precedent if needed." Thus the "March Rector" admitted that the expulsions were illegal and that the authorities intended to make this a new legal order. This was a semiofficial indication that the new law on higher education would completely erase the autonomy of academia and would not just affect students. The minister's March 25 decision to fire five professors from Warsaw University (Leszek Kołakowski, Bronisław Baczko, Włodzimierz Brus, Maria Hirszowicz-Bielińska, and Stefan Morawski) was still just an arbitrary "precedent."[18] Similarly, the subsequent "March purge," a series of expulsions and firings from universities around the country, was also a precedent. The Sejm voted in the new law only in November 1968.[19]

The course of events that started with the March 8 rally is well known. From today's perspective, it is worthwhile to reflect on how we perceived the situation then and what our expectations were. It is also worthwhile to try to sum up these events historically.

On the night of March 3 we made a preliminary decision to organize a rally at the Warsaw University yard. We agreed that the extra-legal decision on expulsions put us against the wall. I was the one who said this first, because until then I was opposed to the idea of a rally. We really had no choice—we had to defend ourselves, and we had no other means of defense. We only needed to make sure that the rector had indeed crossed off Michnik and Szlajfer from the student register. During the next few days we discussed the plan for the rally and prepared the text of the declaration. On March 6, when there was no longer a shadow of a doubt that the expulsions were not a false rumor and the intentions of the authorities were clearly stated by Rybicki, we confirmed our decision. Our thinking was largely limited to the scope of the university. We were thinking in terms of the last similar event that we remembered, that is, the October 1957 student rally at the Polytechnic University dorm at Narutowicza Square followed by street demonstrations against the closing of the *Po Prostu* weekly. We were like generals waging a previous war instead of a new one because that was what had shaped our experience. Our plan called for a short rally, almost like a factory meeting, so as not to give the authorities time to bring in the militia. Indeed, during the rally, the declaration read by Irena Lasota and Mirosław Sawicki was adopted by acclamation. Its last sentence demanded that the Minister of Higher Education and the university rector respond "directly to the student community" within a week.[20] This was tantamount to setting the date for the next rally unless the authorities rescinded the expulsions.

The adoption of the declaration essentially concluded the rally, and this would have been the end of it if not for an immediate attack by Party plainclothes hit squads followed by ORMO and ZOMO detachments.[21] We had considered such a turn of events. We could not exclude the possibility that, as in 1957, the authorities would decide to use the ZOMO against the students, and as a result the rally would turn into street fighting. We imagined that in such a case it would be “little October” all over again—this was what we called the 1957 three-day-long student protests, as opposed to the 1956 “great October.” Our imagination did not go any further—it was eleven years behind the times. We did not imagine that our rally and the police violence at Warsaw University would trigger a wave of student rallies, sit-ins, and street demonstrations in all academic centers in Poland and that the protests would last for a full three weeks. The scale and persistence of these protests justifiably put March 1968 among the “Polish months,” alongside the June 1956, December 1970, and June 1976 workers’ rebellions—the difference being that in 1968 the authorities did not panic so much as start shooting.

We were not the only ones to blame for lack of foresight. Things went beyond the political imagination of our opponents as well, that is, the two competing decision centers—Gomułka’s Party leadership and Moczar’s MSW. No one realized how combustible the society was, especially the youth. Gomułka and his collaborators certainly did not want disturbances that would destabilize the state. Moczar and his political friends were not above showing the Kremlin that Gomułka’s leadership was unable to secure tranquility, therefore people with firmer hands should be given the helm. A small-scale riot could provide them with ammunition, but a three-week-long countrywide protest tarnished his reputation. The suspicion that he had moved the power struggle to the streets diminished his standing in Moscow. In addition, among the leaders of the satellite countries, Gomułka along with GDR’s Ulbricht was the main proponent of invading Czechoslovakia jointly by the communist states. This considerably strengthened Gomułka’s position at the Kremlin. Over several months there was a purge in Party and state personnel under the banner of an anti-Semitic campaign. It was initiated by Moczar but joined by Gomułka, and it elevated many young arrivistes of the ZMP generation to their desired posts. Promoting the “young wolves” of the regime was carried out broadly; it was no longer a battle cry of Moczar’s “Partisans.” As a result, Gomułka took the MSW away from Moczar and sidelined him. After crushing the unruly intelligentsia, Gomułka felt he was the sole ruler of Poland who could do anything he wanted and whom no one could oppose. This was his fatal mistake.

This does not change the fact that the “March events” also proved larger than we who had moved the first pebbles of the avalanche. Their consequences exceeded our imaginations. We did not foresee the scale of repression or the zeal of destruction with which the authorities turned against the “substance” of the national culture. The repressions inflicted unrepairable damage to Polish higher education and scholarship. To use the best-known example, Leszek Kołakowski was fired from Warsaw University in March 1968. He was one of the most internationally renowned philosophers, but he could no longer teach in Poland. He accepted an invitation to lecture in Montreal, then in the United States, and then he was given a chair at Oxford. The Polish authorities revoked his passport as a precaution, so he could not return to Poland. After 1989 he visited Poland many times, his books were widely available in Polish, and any Polish university would have been more than happy to hire him. This did not make up for the fact that Kołakowski had been absent in Polish academia for over two decades. He had not held seminars or mentored students. There never will be a Kołakowski school of philosophy in Warsaw. The continuity was broken. Such losses were many.

Then there is the toxic influence of the unprecedented anti-Semitic campaign on society. Much has been written on this subject, but knowledge about communist fascism of those days is slowly turning into a stereotype. This topic is grim and the narratives also are predominantly grim, so they beg to be lightened by an anecdote. Warsaw University Rector Zygmunt Rybicki, one of the black characters of March 1968, had an uncle on the “light side of the force.” Józef Rybicki was one of the true heroes of the AK underground and later became one of the founders of KOR.[22] He was the commandant of *Kedyw* in Warsaw, and from the autumn of 1945, after the arrest of Colonel Jan Rzepecki by the secret police, he succeeded him at the head of “Freedom and Independence” (WiN).[23] Naturally in 1947 Józef Rybicki was arrested and sentenced to ten years in prison. During the German occupation, alongside his military duties in the Home Army, he had been a member of the underground Council to Aid Jews, “Żegota.”[24] For that reason a journalist active in the propaganda campaign of the 1960s asked him for an interview—the organizers of that anti-Semitic campaign held a strange belief that the heroism of Poles who saved their Jewish cocitizens and risked their lives during the Nazi occupation would remove the stigma of anti-Semitism from the organizers of the anti-Jewish witch hunt in communist Poland. The journalist asked Rybicki about "Żegota."

"Are you sure you were asked to talk about this with me?"

"Yes, of course."

"That's strange."

"Why?"

"Because you know, Rybicki is my wartime alias . . ."

"What is your real name then?"

"Fiszman."

"But the rector of Warsaw University is your nephew!"

"That's right."

"Well, then I must apologize."

The journalist suddenly lost interest, but she informed her superiors what she had learned. The secret police searched Rybicki's background, and when his Aryan pedigree was confirmed beyond a doubt, they told the rector, who had been badly hurt by the insinuation that his family could have been Jewish. Józef Rybicki maintained no contacts with his nephew who nonetheless decided to call him on the phone.

"Uncle, why did you make such a stupid joke?"

The response was, "You asshole, I told you before not to ever call me."

This amusing story prompts some not so funny conclusions. In 1968 Poland's secret police really did check the Aryan background of many Polish citizens, as if Governor General Hans Frank still was residing in Wawel Castle and the Nuremberg Laws still were active on Polish territory. The People's Republic of Poland and the communists added their three pennies or more to the destruction inflicted by the Nazi occupier on the consciences of the Poles. It is true there were antibodies in the nation. There were many thoughtful and courageous people who did not let themselves be fooled or threatened. But there were also many who more or less gave in to the propaganda. The stink of that lie and fear did not completely air out, and it is still discernible in today's multicolored political life. We need to record this residue also as a loss in the balance sheet of March 1968.

This balance sheet does not look good, even in this incomplete account. Should we not have taken the risk, or ducked out of the fight? Frankly we had no such option, even limited to Warsaw University and its rebels. First of all, we all professed the principle “One for all, all for one” (in this case for two). Even if Jacek and I had wanted to disregard the principle—and the thought did not cross our minds—we would not have been able to convince our young friends. Second, the authorities broke the legal rules of academia not just to expel Michnik and Szlajfer—clearly the stakes were much greater.

The tightening of policy toward the intelligentsia was a process that already had been gaining strength for several years. Moczar’s coterie as well as Gomułka’s group clearly aimed at limiting and then completely closing the enclaves of free speech present in Polish scholarship, arts, and academic instruction since 1956. I think that the ban on *Forefathers’ Eve* was a mistake, but it was not accidental but telling. The intelligentsia’s freedom to do their jobs had been effective as a safety valve for a long time, but with the growing social tension, it no longer fit within the logic of dictatorship. The intention to curtail this freedom had been building and found its expression in the preparations for the legal eradication of university autonomy. The “Paratroopers” were a seemingly small but annoying obstacle, and they needed to be pushed out of the way. The expulsion of two students was not the objective but the beginning of an operation against freedom in higher education—limited but vital to the national culture. Our decision to call for a rally was not taken lightly but was an act of necessary self-defense. It was more than just the defense of our two colleagues, or even of the “Paratroopers.” We were also defending the substance of Polish culture against the upcoming threat of destruction by the police state.

We did not manage to defend it. We were not the only ones to fail—there was only a handful of us—and neither were the two thousand students who gathered at Warsaw University on March 8. Thousands of young people from other universities and Polish cities who joined our struggle in the next days and weeks failed also. But the regime had to use police force to break the resistance of the younger generation of Polish intelligentsia to restore its arbitrary hold over the institutions of Polish scholarship, higher education, and culture.

After a defeat the question always arises if we should have defended ourselves. The fact that the situation did not allow us to avoid a fight does not eliminate this question. Perhaps this was our generation's version of the age-old Polish dilemma, "to fight, or not to fight." In my opinion there is no universal solution. The propensity to fight is in accord with the romantic paradigm and fits well into Polish tradition. Avoiding a fight when one does not see the chance to win may reflect a somber positivistic assessment of strengths and weaknesses, which is not the same as an assessment of wins and losses. Losing face can also be pricey if it results in social demoralization and destroys the ability to stand by values that are vital to the community. These general truths need to be remembered, but they do not determine answers automatically. The devil is in the details. As the great Belgian historian Henri Pirenne said, the importance of any given historical event is assessed by its consequences, and consequences are apparent only after a long time.

When I found myself in prison again, I had enough time to count our wins and losses. I counted 1968 as a total loss—the "March events," and especially the "Prague Spring" that was crushed by the invasion. The conclusion I drew was a kind of warning. I knew that we could not have acted differently, but I was more skeptical about the future. The revolutionary optimism had left me for good, even if after December 1970 Poland emerged from the mood of hopelessness that had seized us when red anti-intellectualism temporarily triumphed. But it was too early for an evenhanded evaluation; this would require knowledge of the long-term consequences. Today after forty-five years, we can ask if 1968 actually weakened the foundations of the system and indirectly contributed to the fall of communism.

This impact is not easy to gauge, especially because the fall of communism must be seen in the context of universal history. However, we can point to some long-lasting consequences of the 1968 events that are significant from the Polish perspective. First of all, March 1968 became a collective experience that marked and to a large extent formed the attitudes of a sizable section of young Polish intelligentsia. I frequently encountered people with March 1968 experiences during the Solidarity years. These shared common characteristics useful in a mass union movement and then in the underground. Second, March 1968 was of course traumatic, or rather it was one of the traumas that shook trust in the stability of the system. For the Party thugs, the March triumph was a Pyrrhic victory. This was the case not just because the apparent winner Moczar was pushed to the sidelines after a few months and not because Gomułka was deposed by a workers' rebellion in December 1970 (even if it seemed like he had rid himself of rivals and pacified circles capable of resistance). March 1968 in a way contributed to December 1970. This connection even was seen by a few people at the top of the Party hierarchy. Edward Gierek saw it and mentioned it in a speech at a meeting with delegates from the striking Adolf Warski Shipyard in Szczecin in January 1971.

Gierek made the decision to go to Szczecin and personally negotiate with the shipyard workers in order to "put out the fire." He had no time to prepare his speech. He improvised, and what he said was not filtered by self-censorship. First he presented his view of the political reasons for the crisis and the causes of the "December events." "The last three years were the most tragic period in the life of our Party . . . 1967, 1968, and 1969 . . . especially notable . . . was the disregard of the needs of society . . . detachment from everyday life . . . after March 1968, when in fact not much could have been done anymore."[25]

Not surprisingly, this speech was never published in communist Poland. Neither is it surprising that in his numerous published speeches he never revealed his criticism of the Party's post-March policy. A large part of the Party leadership had been promoted as a result of the March purges, and these people were ready to defend the wave that elevated them as fiercely as Poland's independence, or even more so. The first secretary could not afford to publicly declare opinions that would put him in conflict with his own apparatus. Gierek quietly sought reconciliation with the intelligentsia without openly denouncing the March repressions by making half-hearted gestures, such as allowing expelled students to resume their studies—but outside Warsaw as extension students. I should not quibble—because of this decision I was able to resume my research (but not teaching) in the Wrocław branch of the Institute of Material Culture, Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN). Addressing the striking workers, Gierek had no real need to touch upon March 1968. However, he was not reading a prepared speech, but speaking impromptu, he said what he really thought. Therefore his words must be regarded as sincere. He probably was referring to the situation at the top of the Party-state hierarchy, especially Gomułka's dictatorial style and the governing coterie's wishful thinking about social and economic matters. In this respect, Gierek was well informed, and his opinion was not necessarily unique among Party politicians.

The oversensitivity of the people who were promoted in 1968 abated with the passing of time, but society at large, including some Party activists, retained traumatic memories. In 1988 on the twentieth anniversary of the "March events," Wojciech Jaruzelski's government (likely on Mieczysław Rakowski's initiative) decided to make an extraordinary gesture.[26] *Trybuna Ludu*, the official daily of the Party Central Committee, published a critique of the attitude of the authorities of communist Poland toward the intelligentsia and students in March 1968. The weekly *Polityka* published a reliable timetable of the events by Wiesław Władyka and Zbysław Rykowski.[27] This was a kind of invitation by the authorities, who seven years earlier had introduced martial law, for a political reconciliation with the intelligentsia on the grounds of reinterpreting history from twenty years earlier but without changing their position toward the delegalized Solidarity. This offer was unacceptable, and it was not accepted.

Ten years later, March 1968 once more reappeared in current politics. The Party was no more. The SdRP and the SLD, described by their opponents as postcommunist formations, had an uneasy attitude toward their disbanded predecessor and were critical of what the "deceased Party" did in 1968.[28] With political pluralism and a shock in society caused by rapid change in the economic system, the post-Solidarity camp broke into quarreling factions. The idea of political rapprochement over historical divisions was growing among the politicians who were shaping the strategy of the UW on one side and the SLD on the other.[29] Adam Michnik advocated for the need for a "historical compromise." The president of Poland, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, seized the initiative. On March 9, 1998, he presented the Order of the White Eagle to two people accused and sentenced in trials from March 1968, that is, Kuroń (then one of the most popular politicians) and me (already a political outsider).[30]

I do not know if this gesture shocked anybody in Kwaśniewski's political camp. I know it outraged a few UD activists—I do not blame them and will not mention their names.[31] Instead I will describe a gaffe I made on the day I was decorated. After the official ceremony, the president invited Kuroń, Michnik, and me to a back room. There was a small table, chairs, and a bookcase. Kwaśniewski took a bottle of cognac with four glasses and poured. The official tone disappeared and we started chatting. Jacek and Adam were on a first-name basis with Kwaśniewski. They called him "Olek," and he called them "Adaś" and "Jacek." I was the only one he addressed formally—as "Professor," and I called him "Mr. President." After the first glass, Adam suggested that I drink a *brüderschaft* with the president of the Republic of Poland. Instead of simply obliging, I started to say that Adam Michnik always forced his friends to drink *brüderschafts*, and that he once had forced me to do it with Mieczysław Rakowski who was polite and later pretended he did not remember it. Alas, I continued saying that Adam also forced me to a *brüderschaft* with Marek Król, who was not as polite.[32] Every time he met me (and it was only in public) he opened his arms wide and cried "Karol," and I did not know where to look. As I was telling the story, I increasingly felt uneasy, but I could not stop because this would look even stupider. When I finally stopped, Kwaśniewski smiled and said, "Professor, don't worry. Sometimes the pope nominates cardinals *in pectore*, without revealing their names. You can drink a *brüderschaft* with me *in pectore*." To think that I was one who was the son of a diplomat! Of course we drank, and on the few occasions we have met since, we have been on a first-name basis.

NOTES

1. Trans. Harold B. Segel.
2. Bogna—Bogumiła Pazdur-Modzelewska (b. 1939)—was the author's first wife; a historian by training, she worked for the Institute of International Affairs as a specialist in Italy.
3. "Kite"—in prison slang, a note smuggled between prisoners or from prisoners to the outside.
4. "Going among the people" (Russian: *хождение в народ*) was a common slogan among the Narodniks, a political movement of the Russian middle

class in the 1860s and 1870s.

5. That is, a person decorated with the Order of the Builders of the People’s Poland (Polish: Order Budowniczych Polski Ludowej), the highest civilian decoration in communist Poland.

6. “Giewont” and “Sport” were brand names of cheap Polish cigarettes.

7. Irena Lasota (b. 1945) is a philosopher, publicist, publisher, social and political activist, and president/codirector of the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe.

8. Stanisław Walczak (1913–2002) was a scholar of law and politics; he was the Minister of Justice between 1965 and 1971.

9. Bogdan Suchodolski (1903–1992) was a philosopher, historian of science and culture, and teacher. He served as a senior marshal of the Sejm from 1985 to 1989.

10. Andrzej Murzynowski (1926–2016) was a law professor. He served as the head of the Warsaw University disciplinary commission in 1965–1966.

11. Maria Ossowska (1896–1974) was a philosopher-ethicist and sociologist of morality. Henryk Greniewski (1903–1972) was a mathematician and logician. Leszek Kubicki (b. 1930) is a lawyer and justice of the Supreme Court emeritus.

12. Ewa Wipszycka (b. 1933) is a classical historian. Andrzej Garlicki (1935–2013) was a historian of modern Poland.

13. Tadeusz Kotarbiński (1886–1981) was a philosopher, logician, and ethicist. Czesław Bobrowski (1904–1996) was an economist.

14. For the actual text of the decision, see Franciszek Dąbrowski, “Przed Marcem: Orzeczenie Komisji Dyscyplinarnej dla Studentów UW z 11 listopada 1965 r,” www.polska1918-89.pl/pdf/przed-marcem.-orzeczenie-komisji-dyscyplinarnej-dla-studentow-uw-z-11-,5347.pdf.

15. Zygmunt Rybicki (1925–1989) was a lawyer and state official. He served as the rector of Warsaw University between 1969 and 1980. He was a nephew of the cofounder of KOR Józef Rybicki.

16. Jakub Karpiński (1940–2003) was a sociologist, historian, and political scientist.

17. The meeting of the Warsaw chapter of the Union of Polish Writers was held on February 29, 1968, to protest the decision to ban the performances of *Forefathers’ Eve*. The participants adopted a resolution

condemning the state’s cultural policy and demanding the abolition of censorship and the restoration of artistic freedom.

18. Bronisław Baczko (1924–2016) was a philosopher and historian of ideas. Maria Hirszowicz (née Bielińska, 1925–2007) was a political sociologist. Stefan Morawski (1921–2004) was a philosopher and historian of aesthetics.

19. The author refers to the “Law on the Change of the Law on Higher Education,” voted by the Sejm on December 20, 1968; see http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU19680460334/O/D19680334.pdf.

20. Mirosław Sawicki (1946–2016) was a physics teacher.

21. The Voluntary Reserve of the Citizens’ Militia (Polish: Ochotnicza Rezerwa Milicji Obywatelskiej, ORMO) was a paramilitary organization and voluntary support brigade of the communist police force, the MO. The Motorized Reserves of the Citizens’ Militia (Polish: Zmotoryzowane Odwody Milicji Obywatelskiej, ZOMO) was the riot police.

22. Józef Rybicki (1901–1986) was a classicist. The Home Army (Polish: Armia Krajowa, AK) was the dominant Polish resistance force in Poland during World War II. It was subjected to the London-based Polish government-in-exile, and it constituted the armed wing of the Polish “underground state.”

23. The Directorate of Diversion (Polish: Kierownictwo Dywersji, or Kedyw) was an AK unit that conducted sabotage, propaganda, and armed operations against German forces and collaborators. Jan Rzepecki (1899–1983) was a soldier and military historian. In 1945 he founded the underground anticommunist organization Freedom and Independence (Polish: Zrzeszenie Wolność i Niezawisłość, WiN). He was arrested in November 1945 and released from jail in 1947.

24. The Council to Aid Jews “Żegota” (full codename: “Konrad Żegota Committee,” Polish: Rada Pomocy Żydom przy Delegaturze Rządu RP na Kraj) was an underground resistance organization, a part of the Polish “underground state.” It was also an official governmental agency in the London-based government-in-exile.

25. This quote is from Michał Paziewski, *Debata robotników z Gierkiem, Szczecin 1971* (Kraków: Więź, 2010), 94.

26. Mieczysław F. Rakowski (1926–2008) was a journalist and communist politician. A longtime editor-in-chief of the weekly *Polityka*, in 1988 he became the prime minister, and between 1989 and 1990 he served as the last first secretary of the Party.

27. Zbysław Rykowski and Wiesław Władyka, “Marzec ’68,” *Polityka*, February 20, 1988.

28. The Social-Democracy of the Republic of Poland (Polish: Socjaldemokracja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, SdRP) was a Social-Democratic party created in 1990 as the principal successor party to the PZPR. In 1999 the SdPR cofounded the Democratic Left Alliance (Polish: Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, SLD).

29. The Freedom Union (Polish: Unia Wolności, UW) left-wing political party, 1994–2005.

30. The Order of the White Eagle (Polish: Order Orła Białego) is Poland’s highest decoration.

31. The Democratic Union (Polish: Unia Demokratyczna, UD) was a liberal Christian-Democratic party established in 1991.

32. Marek Król (b. 1953) is a journalist.

Chapter 5

The Prison Side of the World

In my life I've stood
before many judges,
and bent many bars—
got many sentences,
but the executioner
still has to wait for me.
—"I'm a Lucky Thief," an old prison song, anonymous[1]

THE PALACE OF WONDERS

Like Jacek Kuroń, I grew up believing that prison ennobles. Walls and bars were an important backdrop, and handcuffs were important props in the theater of my young imagination in which the central roles were played by nineteenth-century revolutionaries who proudly wore "gray prisoners' caps" and rang for their oppressors by banging their chains against the bars to the rhythm of a mazurka.[2] This sentimental education turned out to be useful in my adulthood. Role models from more recent times and my closest circle also proved handy. I knew about the stubborn (and eventually successful) resistance of my father against NKVD torture in Lubyanka. Witold Leder was another authority for me. He did not break down despite six weeks of sleep deprivation in the dungeons of the Military Intelligence on Chałubińskiego Street in Warsaw, and he did not lose his optimism or sense of humor.

These examples, as well as my own view of the system of communist Poland, effectively shielded me from the dangerous delusion that the secret police officers whom I encountered for the first time in November 1964 were protecting a state for which I should feel some kind of ideological affinity. I felt obliged to display nothing more than vague politeness. I cannot say that I hated them. I tried to treat my interrogators without any emotion, like enemy soldiers who need to be defeated. Such an attitude worked well during the investigations against me.

But my attitude toward prison itself was not unemotional; to the contrary, it was colored by my sentimental education. On March 19, 1965, after a search of my apartment, I was taken to the MSW building on Rakowiecka Street. After a prolonged wait for the state prosecutor Maria Pancer, who presented me with a new charge from Article 23 of the so-called Little Penal Code (mkk) and the decision to temporarily arrest me, I was taken to the jail on the opposite side of the street.[3] The plainclothes agents handed me to the wardens. The tone changed instantly—instead of courtesy dripping with oily fakeness, I was met by a corporal's shouts. I surrendered my watch, papers, and personal belongings, as well as my underwear. In their stead I received prison long johns and a shirt, blanket, towel, sheet, aluminum bowl, plate and spoon, gray jacket made of rough fabric ("katana"), and round cap made from the same fabric ("kaniołka"). Of course I thought of the "Mazurka in Chains."

Thus equipped, accompanied by a warden, I walked through a unit with rows of walkways on both sides and a central stairway. It was late, after the evening roll call. Next to the locked cells stood stools with "cubes" on them, that is, the prisoners' clothes wrapped up in towels with bowls and plates turned upside down like soldiers' helmets; shoes stood "at attention" next to the stools. I was starting a new life. I felt not so much fear as an exciting shiver of emotion and curiosity. I was led to a four-person cell. Both lower bunks were taken, so I took an upper bunk. Through the barred window and in the gleam of a searchlight that swept the prison yard, I admired the grim neogothic red brick architecture. The Mokotów prison was built in 1904 in the style of Russian barracks and hospital buildings of the time. Only at the end of the 1960s were the walls plastered a hideous gray, which deprived them of their particular fascinating beauty. A few days after my arrival, my cellmate Janusz T. (an informer called in secret police investigative lingo as a "cell informant") noticed with indignation that I was treating prison like an adventure. Indeed, in March 1965, at twenty-seven, I was undoubtedly an adult, but my first reactions to jail were childlike, as if I had entered a world of books about brave revolutionaries and insurgents.

I spent a total of eight and a half years in communist Poland's investigative and penal prisons. This was more than enough time to find out that my first impressions had little in common with reality. With growing experience I realized that prisons are not a different world but a particular reflection of society, something like the other side of a coin. It is not enough to look at one side; in order to know the coin well, one also needs to see the flip side. Although my experiences are from the previous system, the changes in the Polish state, society, and culture are not deep enough to say that everything is different now. Therefore I think it is worthwhile to describe my prison experiences. They also can be useful for readers who grew up after communism and never knew any other Poland.

The isolation unit of the MSW Bureau of Investigations within the Mokotów prison was a very specific place. Despite the presence of wardens and the common prison procedures, it was ruled by the SB according to the needs of their investigations. The unit only housed inmates who were suspected of political crimes, spying, large-scale economic crimes, or currency exchange. There were also informers recruited from the people already sentenced and serving terms but pretending they were still under investigation. It was a small artificial world where one was always conscious of eavesdropping, as if under the omnipresent and unceasing watch of hostile eyes and ears. Therefore this unit, added during the time of Różański to buildings erected from the time of Tsar Nicolas II, was not a true window on the prison world.[4] Real prisons were penitentiaries for those with sentences, where one landed among common criminals. To experience the social problems of prisons, one first had to undergo an investigation and court trial capped by a sentence of at least a few years. I will describe my prison experiences starting logically with the investigation and trial.

The Bureau of Investigations team at the Mokotów prison extracted confessions that met the needs of the secret police. This was not always the same as the need for truth. Torture was a common practice during Stalinist times. It was used to break prisoners in order to extract information or to compel them to make a confession (usually false) desired by those who were orchestrating the case. In 1956 such methods were publicly denounced and torture was prohibited. Traumatic memories of the Party activists and leaders who previously had been victims of cruel police activism or had lived in fear ensured that the ban on torture was upheld. I was never beaten, and I know of no case in which any of my coaccused were beaten during interrogation. Only Adam Michnik was punched in the face by an officer who was guarding him as Michnik was reading his files in 1968. This incident was described in a memo added to his file. The officer denied the charge, and his colleagues stated that they saw no bruises on Adam's face. In any case, the officer who hit him was not trying to extract a confession—he just lost his temper. I do not think that Adam was harassing the officer in order to provoke him. On the other hand, I know that he possesses an unparalleled ability to drive SB officers nuts. When he was a suspect but not arrested, he would come to an interrogation with a book and ostensibly read while the officer was asking him questions. The officer would wait in vain for any answer, even a denial.

Still, it is possible to extract confessions and plant content desired by interrogators even without physical torture. A person can be broken not just through beating, sleep deprivation, waterboarding, or electric shock; it also can be achieved more slowly but just as effectively through an open-ended, long-term lockup combined with psychological pressure and the deception that a prisoner will be able to go home and join his family in exchange for testifying. It is also possible to threaten to send the prisoner's closest relatives to jail, or even arrest his wife, fiancée, or daughter, and politely explain that this beloved person will be released when the suspect decides to collaborate. All these practices were used with currency dealers, suspects of economic crimes, and political prisoners after the end of Stalinism in Poland. In the 1960s investigating officers talked about this unashamedly—"He's not confessing? Not telling on others? Not answering the right way? No problem, we have time. When he's been here longer he'll soften up." The same practice also flourishes in free Poland as so-called extractive custody.

Isolation is like a surgical extraction. You are cut off from all your social ties that form the fabric of your life. Your only conversations are now with the interrogating officer, occasionally with the prosecutor, and with your cellmates. The interrogator pretends to be friendly and gives you "good advice"—if you relax and respond honestly, you can only blame yourself. Even if you steel yourself and avoid the trap, there is a risk that you will relax in the cell and drop your guard with your cellmates who are people in similar trouble. This is another trap. One of the cellmates—and usually you do not know who—is a rat. The "interrogations" to which the rat is taken are not about him but you—these are actually meetings between the handling officer and the "cell informant." If you confess to a rat in your cell, it is as if you are talking to the secret police, even if you are not talking to them during your interrogations. "Cell informant" reports cannot be used as evidence at trial; still, they contain information that the secret police can use in their actions and in their internal communication. Moreover, although a "cell informant" may talk, it is the officer who takes down his words, and sometimes he adds a fiction that in his opinion can be useful in another investigation or political game.

My first "cell informant," Janusz T., introduced himself as a physician who was a suspect in a political case purportedly from Article 22 of the mkk. Many years later I learned that he had served a term for forging his medical diploma, which had allowed him to become head of a hospital in a provincial town. In the MSW isolation unit, he informed on prisoners in order to gain early release. I did not suspect him. I was a prison newbie, but I tried to be cautious because I assumed that the cell was bugged just like my apartment. After the completion of the investigation, I was allowed to meet with my attorney, Tadeusz de Virion.[5] He asked about my cellmates. When I mentioned Janusz T., he put a finger to his lips and said soundlessly, "Be careful." I have never read my file, but Andrzej Friszke told me that the handling officer's reports of information given by Janusz T. contained falsehoods. They stated that on March 18, 1965, I handed the "Open Letter" to Professors Oskar Lange, Michał Kalecki, and Bogusław Leśniodorski (none of whom I knew at that time) and to Dr. Stanisław Frybes (whom I knew because he had visited my mother, and I even met him at the university the day before my arrest, but it did not occur to me to give him our text).[6] All these fantasies could not have been invented by a fake doctor from a little Podlasie town who probably had never heard of any of these people. His revelations were the fruit of the handling officer's imagination. This fake information, supposedly obtained from me by the rat in my cell, was apparently needed by the secret police to target these well-known intellectuals. Perhaps the SB wanted to use it as a justification to start their surveillance or in confidential reports for higher-ups. This information could not be used as evidence at trial, but it could become a part of police or political intrigues because it was not subject to verification. One can feel sorry for Party dignitaries who believed these secret police reports—not to mention today's historians who take these reports at face value.

A "cell informant" also could be an agent of influence. In the MSW isolation unit, a prisoner could not see or hear any other prisoners except his cellmates, and the Investigation Bureau officers decided who was placed with whom. This did not seem strange—there were sixty four-person cells in the unit, and the inmates had to be placed so that suspects in the same case could not contact each other. But in figuring this out, the secret police considered more than simply the need for isolation. For instance, a "repentant" suspect could be put together with a cosuspect who was not yet "repentant." Talented "cell informants" were used to soften those who resisted. This was sometimes successfully applied with young and inexperienced students from the "Paratroopers" in 1968. This certainly was standard practice.

I was held in Mokotów prison three times: 1965, 1968–1969, and 1982–1984. I learned to recognize "cell informants." In May 1968 I was presented with a new charge of collaboration with Trotskyites along with my original charge for the "March events," for which I was arrested two months earlier. The Trotskyite charge was entirely based on evidence that had been examined and rejected by the court in 1965. At that time a new inmate who was a prosecutor from Wrocław named K. arrived in our cell. He had been sentenced for twelve years or so for bribery. I knew him because I had met him at Barczewo prison. He wore the same overalls as I, but he did not work in the prison furniture factory. Instead he worked in the finance department distributing the so-called *wypiska*, that is, food, cigarettes, and toiletries that prisoners could buy for two hundred zlotys subtracted from their pay. Now he claimed that they had brought him to Mokotów because they were preparing an additional investigation against him. I had no doubts about his true role. Because he was not likable, which is rather important when you spend twenty-four hours a day together in a nine-square-meter cell, I hinted that I knew why he was there.

This was effective. After a few days K. was taken away, and Julian P.-H. was brought in. He was an assistant professor at a law department in a well-known university. He taught extension students, especially those from the militia and the Party, who could obtain a diploma without much effort and for a reasonable fee. He was sentenced to nine years for this and for helping to bribe prosecutors. During the occupation, he had been in the Home Army. After the war he was on the opposite side in the military court system and reached the rank of colonel. Among his cases was one against the young people from the underground organization Ruch Oporu Armii Krajowej (Home Army Resistance Movement). He told me with complete conviction that they were terrible bandits. In 1950 he was dismissed from the army, but he found a soft landing at the university. I met him in 1966 or 1967 in Barczewo, and now he claimed he had new charges against him and was under investigation. He received a food parcel every month instead of three times a year like prisoners with sentences. I knew he was a decoy. However, I did not let on because the colonel turned professor had a sense of humor and likely he knew that I knew. We accepted the situation with a wink, and I think we had a bearable time together. He left on a conditional early release, although he did not tell me himself but I figured it out. Upon leaving he gave me a holy card and made the sign of the cross on my forehead. He was a brother-in-law of a well-known Church dignitary, and even if he did not ostentatiously display his faith, he certainly was religious. He died a few years ago. I hope God forgave his sins. As for me, it was my own fault if I ever said something to him that the secret police should not have known. Besides, his handling officer wrote whatever he thought necessary in the reports anyway.

By 1968 I think the secret police regarded me as an artful dodger. They still put rats in my cell, but apparently with decreasing enthusiasm. I consider it a genuine compliment that I did not receive any “kites” during a time when many of the “Paratroopers” were tricked into testifying because of fake “kites.” Of course I knew how the Investigation Unit was organized. The prison guard officers were thoroughly vetted and loyal (which does not mean they were nasty). The *kalifaktors*, or prisoners with sentences who delivered food and cleaned corridors, always worked under a warden’s watchful eye and were afraid of their own shadow. It would be easier for a mouse to slip in than a “kite.” When the young and naïve first-timers started to encourage each other and strengthen their resistance with delivered “kites,” this was of course controlled by the investigators. Over time the secret police started to forge the “kites” themselves and achieved success—the young people started to confess. But the SB delivered no “kites” to me. Perhaps they were afraid that I would start screaming about provocation through the window, like Jacek Kuroń.

I landed in the Mokotów MSW unit for the third time on December 22, 1982. The following day the people interned on and after December 13, 1981, were to be released—that is, all except a few. I was magically transformed from interned to arrested, along with Andrzej Gwiazda, Marian Jurczyk, Grzegorz Palka, Seweryn Jaworski, Jan Rulewski, and Andrzej Rozpłochowski.[7] We were charged with attempting to overthrow the system (Article 123 of the Penal Code) and moved from Białołęka internment center to Mokotów. In Białołęka we could sleep until noon, whereas in Mokotów roll call was at 6:00 a.m. My first roll call was taken by the unit supervisor nicknamed “Jasiu,” whom I had known since 1965. I did not think that he would still be there. I was still half asleep when I saw him standing in my cell door, and I was so surprised that I muttered, “Jasiu!” He smiled forgivingly (talking was prohibited), locked the door, and went on. Soon he returned with a “kalifaktor” who put a bucket with warm water in the cell and took out the trash. To make up for my earlier gaffe, I said politely, “Good morning, Mr. Supervisor.”

“Good morning! But why weren’t you here in 1977? Kuroń and Michnik were here, everybody was here—but not you!”

“I was not a member of KOR, Mr. Supervisor.”

“I see.”

“Jasiu” was unconvinced. Apparently he thought this was a lame excuse, and I should have been here with my friends. Perhaps he was right. In any case, now I felt honored, as it was clear that the secret police decided not to waste “cell informants” on me. For the next eight months I was in a cell with Wojciech Dobrzyński, later the head of the parliamentary bureau of the PC party, who definitely was not a rat.[8] After he was released on the 1984 amnesty, my cellmate was a dark-skinned Tamil man from Sri Lanka who only spoke Tamil and English. He knew a little Sanskrit, but had no clue about Poland and was not suitable to be a rat. However, during the 1984 Holy Week two new prisoners were added to our cell. One was an ambulance driver who was as innocent as a lamb, and the other was a clerk in the Finance Ministry. The latter smelled of a rat from a mile away.

I was surprised and even offended. I only realized what was going on when on Good Friday I was taken from my cell to the inner courtyard. Jan Rulewski (whom I had not been allowed to see) and I were put into a van marked “Municipal Street Maintenance,” and under plainclothes guard we were taken to an MSW villa in Chylice near Warsaw. We were offered an honorable surrender negotiated by the Church and the generals in power. The seven arrested members of the Solidarity Countrywide Commission (KK) and the KOR members were to promise Primate Glemp in writing that they would cease their activities for two and a half years.[9] In exchange we would be immediately released, and the authorities would consider another amnesty for the remaining political prisoners. We were taken to Chylice a few more times, and the Finance Ministry rat tried to find out my response. I was as silent as the grave, and when on May 13 we announced our decision in Chylice to reject the proposal, the rat was taken to another cell.

The last surprise was prepared by the prisoner distribution unit (actually the secret police) on July 23, 1984. On the previous day an amnesty was declared that included us. When the unit supervisor opened the door, pointed to me, and ordered, “Pack up your stuff,” I was convinced that I was going to be released. Instead he led me up a flight of stairs, opened a cell door, and shouted, “Unpack and make up your bunk.” There were four bunks, and only one was occupied. For the next two weeks I was in that cell together with Jacek Kuroń. This was unheard of, but I knew why they put us together. Jacek too was sure that the secret police had decided that before releasing us they would like to listen to our conversations when we thought we were alone. Directly above us was an interrogation room where Michnik had visits with his lawyer under special supervision after he had smuggled out and published underground his offensive letter to General Czesław Kiszczak.[10] This was the most electronics-laden place in the entire Mokotów prison. When Supervisor “Jasiu” saw Kuroń and me together during morning roll call, he shook his head, “Am I dreaming?” And he had seen many strange things before.

THEMIS WITH CROOKED SCALES: POLITICAL INVESTIGATIONS AND COURT CASES

Most of the “Paratroopers” arrested in March 1968 were tricked by fake “kites” and started to testify. But even when they provided information that could harm others, they mostly told the truth and stuck to it. This truth could have been useful to the secret police for other cases, but it was not what this particular investigation was about. This investigation was set up for propaganda and court room dramaturgy. For that, falsehoods were needed. Some of the “Paratroopers” let themselves be talked into lying. As they read the horrible calumnies in the newspapers and heard the words of their interrogators, they said as if in their own defense, “It was not me, I didn’t want this. Movers and shakers behind the scenes, cynical players, dragged me into it. I renounce them. I want to return to the healthy part of the nation . . .” There were even some who in their own notes or statements tried to reconstruct with their imagination (that is, construct) the supposed secret scenario of events that they “had not understood” before their arrests and now started to grasp—with the help of the newspapers and the interrogating officers. Then their testimonies and statements were used by Ryszard Gontarz, Maria Osiadacz, Kazimierz Kąkol, and other stars of the March propaganda, and Prosecutor Leszek Pietrasiński quoted from them in court.[11]

To the prosecutor’s despair, witnesses who behaved well in prison isolation often regained their sense of reality and sanity after being released and in court renounced their earlier testimonies from the “Palace of Wonders.” This was painful to watch. According to the code of penal procedures, the accused (or technically the “suspect”) had to be acquainted with the evidence before the trial. When I read the testimony of Andrzej Mencwel in the interrogation room supervised by Lieutenant Tomasz K., especially a long text titled “The Case of the ‘Paratroopers,’” I felt a cold rage.[12] These fifty-eight typed pages formed a sophisticated essay. They contained no new information, but they presented the interpretation of the “March events” completely in line with Moczarite propaganda. Our activities, the student rebellion, and the protests of the intellectuals were portrayed as an attempt at a coup d’état to restore the

“Puławska group” to the Party leadership. Mencwel did not invent this. It was what the most aggressive newspapers had been writing about from the first day of the March propaganda campaign. But his essay, presented as part of his witness testimony, elevated that nonsensical fairy tale to the status of trial evidence.

I arranged with my lawyer, Tadeusz de Virion, for the defense not to question Mencwel, who was to testify for the prosecution; instead I would do it myself. Court procedure allows this. But Mencwel got the jump on me. At the beginning of his testimony, in a loud voice he declared, “I withdraw all testimonies given during the investigation because, even if they contain elements of truth, as a whole they are a construction that is consciously false and were created in order to incriminate the accused.”

A mere description cannot convey the drama of that scene. It was as if an earthquake had brought on an illumination. Before the trial I despised Mencwel. Now I saw the torment with which he dragged these words of bitter truth out of himself and dealt with his own debacle. Although he certainly was not thinking of teaching me a lesson, I am absolutely sure that in that courthouse I learned one of the most important lessons of my life. I saw how much heroic effort is required in order to rise from a fall. Human psychological complexity, or rather the many dimensions of man, ceased to be a bookish formula for me. It became part of my life and personal memory. I think that the moral aspect of this knowledge occurred to me then too. Zbigniew Herbert wrote, “Let your sister Contempt never leave you for spies, torturers, cowards . . .”[13] This is a fine poem, but after I heard Mencwel’s testimony in court, I always have preferred “my sister Contempt” to stay away from me. This helps my moral health and my ability to understand my fellow man.

Despite being so impressed with Andrzej Mencwel’s statement, I still had to ask him the questions I had planned.

I asked him where he wrote his essay. He answered that he wrote it in his cell. Why did he have a typewriter in his cell? He said that he got it from the MSW Bureau of Investigations to write “The Case of the ‘Paratroopers.’” He also received an official copy of our “Open Letter” so he could quote from it. Then I asked the court to provide the days and hours that Mencwel was interrogated as a witness. It turned out that he was interrogated from July 30 to August 8, 1968, with only a one-day break on August 4. These interrogations lasted from morning until night. Andrzej was returned to his cell shortly before the lights were turned out. The switches, of course, were in the corridor and not in the cells, thus between 9:00 p.m. and the next morning prisoners were not able to write. I asked him by what miracle he had managed to type a fifty-eight-page text during a single day. Andrzej answered that he had written the essay earlier, before he was interrogated as a witness. On the last day of these unending interrogations he handed his text to the interrogating officer and declared that it should be "regarded as an integral part of my recorded testimony."

At this point my lawyer jumped up and asked what Mencwel's legal status was when he wrote his statement.

"I was a suspect," responded Andrzej.

"So you wrote your statement as a suspect?"

"Yes, I intended to use it in my own case."

De Virion turned to the court with a motion not to treat this text, which was written under a completely different legal status, as the testimony of a witness. He supported his motion using the rules of penal proceedings. The prosecutor objected, but Judge Wiesław Sikorski, who was presiding over the case, whispered to the two other judges and ruled that this document could not be treated as a part of Mencwel's testimony. Thus the court decided not to count it as evidence.

This was not the only defeat for the prosecution in our case. The investigation-prosecution-court machine was able to produce lies efficiently only if there was no controversy between the political decision makers about a particular case. Kuroń and I were lucky. In July 1965 when we were tried for the "Open Letter," and in January 1969 when we were tried for the March events, Gomułka and Kliszko disagreed on one side, and Moczar and his people disagreed on the other. Thus a crack opened through which the truth could reach daylight. In our post-March 1968 trial, the judges managed to get and use a considerable margin of independence.

In both our cases, trying us for what we actually did (that is, the "Open Letter" and the "March events") as well as for "collaborating with the Fourth International, a foreign organization hostile toward the People's

Republic of Poland" (that is, Western Trotskyites) turned out to be politically controversial.[14] According to the MSW and prosecutor general's scenario, we wrote our first unfinished manifesto and then the "Open Letter" at the directive from the evil Trotskyite international cabal.

In 1965, and 1968–1969, this scenario was based on the testimony of Ludwik Hass. He was a (genuine) prewar Trotskyite. He had been arrested by the Soviets in Lwów after it was taken by the Red Army, and he was sentenced to eight years in the camps. Naïvely we regarded him as a hero, whereas he covered up his animal-like fear from the Gulag with loud bravado. As a result of Józef Kossecki's (code named "X") information, Hass was arrested in March 1965 at the same time we were, and he instantly surprised the investigators with a deluge of information largely unknown to them. He gave away Kazimierz Badowski, also a prewar Trotskyite, whose contacts with the Fourth International were unknown to the secret police until then. He told them that Badowski had a duplicator obtained from Belgian Trotskyites. Hass claimed that he had not contacted the Trotskyites on his own initiative but that Kuroń and I had dragged him into it. He readily confirmed the secret police's suggestion that our 1964 manifesto and the "Open Letter" were written on orders from the Fourth International.

Compared to this robust narrative, what actually happened was rather simple. At the beginning of 1957, a French journalist visited me during my office hours at the University Revolutionary Union of Youth (RZM). I told him about the RZM, and later he sent me an article he had written and a leaflet by French Trotskyites containing the theses of the Fourth International, *Le Declin et la Chute du Stalinisme* (*The Decline and Fall of Stalinism*). He likely suggested that Badowski visit me in Warsaw, and Badowski tried to convince me that the place for young revolutionaries was the Fourth International. I was skeptical, although I found Badowski quite personable.

Five or six years later, when I was chairing the ZMS Discussion Club at Warsaw University, George Dobbeler, a member of the national Jeune Garde Socialiste board (that is, the youth section of the Belgian socialist party) contacted Kuroń and me. He had visited Poland several times as a ZMS Central Committee official guest, but he was also a Trotskyite.

Western-European Trotskyist organizations were tiny, and their activists fulfilled their revolutionary mission by working in larger left-wing parties—with communists or socialists. Dobbeler did not hide the fact that he was a Trotskyite, and like Badowski, he proposed collaboration, although he did not try to enlist me. I gladly accepted the literature he brought, especially Trotsky's works that were unavailable in Poland, but I did not agree to collaborate. Even bait in the form of Badowski's duplicator did not persuade me. Both Jacek and I thought that, if we needed, we could access the duplicators at the ZMS or the ZHP Headquarters.

But in 1964 we found out that the ZMS and ZHP machines were no longer accessible to us, so we turned to the Polish Trotskyites. First we asked Hass. When he did not give us a straightforward answer, I personally went to Kraków to ask Badowski to lend us his duplicator. Hass, as we suspected, was against this and justified his opposition in a letter passed to Badowski via Roman Śmiech who served as a liaison between the two. Badowski responded to Hass explaining why they should help print our manifesto despite the fact we were not Trotskyites. Absentmindedly, Badowski did not destroy the draft of his response. The SB found it during a search of his apartment and included it with the investigation materials. The most important excerpts from that document read:

> Despite the fact that 1) I stressed repeatedly to Filip [Dobbeler's code name—K. M.] and other members of the Fourth [International] the vast difference in viewpoints between them and Karol, and I also brought up the fact that several years earlier in our conversation, Karol [had stressed that] he never had wanted to have anything to do with the Fourth;[15]
> Because of this, I ceased contact with Karol, and I felt that none of our ideologically committed comrades who he knew were with the Fourth should have contacted him either;
> I do not deny the need for further mutually informative contact with him which should be conducted with the usual precautions on both sides; the emissaries of the Fourth should not acknowledge affiliation with us, or even knowledge of us [. . .];
> I think we should *make it* [the duplicator] *available (lend it) to them*, even if this means we cannot use it when needed, and even the loan

> may turn out to be permanent and the thing not returned—either because, or in spite of their intentions. [. . .]
>
> This is my justification:
>
> [. . .] Their manifesto represents a sum of views of a certain group, but it may represent the current state of mind of a broader circle. Its critical analysis will be more effective because each argument will reach many minds. [. . .] Most importantly, if I understand the manifesto correctly, an ideals-driven group finally is constituting itself as such [. . .], taking responsibility for a platform, and with this platform in hand is crossing the border of legality—that Rubicon beyond which only individual sporadic excursions have been made until now. [. . .] We do not want to rely on a temporary technical advantage, but count on the strength of our arguments. [. . .] It is likely that our criticism [. . .] will find its way to an organized group more easily than scattered or random individuals. It is possible that we may not have the thing we lent when we really need for it, [but] in terms of spreading our criticism, this can be managed with a simple typewriter at this stage (to facilitate the members of our group staying in touch, and easier circulation of documents).
>
> Therefore we need to "resign ourselves to" lending the requested things [that is, duplicator and stencils] even if this might speed up the moment when [the duplicator] will be needed by us.

Badowski's letter was created independently from the investigation, the secret police's schemes, and Hass's cowardly servility—therefore it was indisputable as evidence in our trial. In light of this letter, the charges that Jacek and I acted on orders from Western Trotskyites and that the "Open Letter" was written on their behest were nonsensical from the beginning. We need to think why the MSW and the prosecutor general stuck to these charges in 1965, despite this conclusive counterevidence, and why they returned to it in 1968 and relied on the 1965 files despite the previous negative court evaluation of these materials. That evaluation was explicitly worded in the final sentence that levied our prison terms for the "Open Letter." It is equally important to ask why the Party leadership did not enforce this scenario in 1965, and why, when the same accusation returned in 1968, they permitted the court to again reject it. The evidence definitely made it easier for Kliszko and Gomułka to reject the scheme proposed by Moczar, but in court cases, the state and Party leaders did not follow the logic of evidence but rather important political considerations. What could these considerations have been?

The Trotskyite opposition within the Bolshevik party was effectively destroyed by Stalin in the 1920s, and in the 1930s it was physically eradicated by the NKVD. In the 1960s Trotskyism existed only in the West, and only in a residual form. There was the Fourth International, but its parties were niche groups that only saw the possibility of effective work within the ranks of official communist parties. True, a number of prominent intellectuals and politicians of the European left were affiliated with Trotskyite groups in their early youth, but they reached their positions in intellectual and political life long after their Trotskyite episodes. The Fourth International was no real threat to the Soviet empire.

But the Kremlin's attitude toward the Trotskyites was determined not by realism but by psychosis. Stalin regarded Trotsky (justifiably) as his most prominent competitor and then opponent in the Bolshevik party. Additionally, the Soviet dictator had a complex. His formal education was limited to a few years in a religious seminary; in fact, he was self-educated, and Trotsky's undeniable intellectual superiority pained him. Stalin really hated his opponent. In 1940 he ordered the murder of Trotsky in Mexico. In Russia, the apparatus of terror chased and killed the true and (more often) supposed Trotskyites with special zeal. Stalin died and was buried and condemned, but the KGB inherited his obsessions. This was true for the leadership of the Soviet Communist Party as well. Even in the 1960s the Trotskyite obsession clouded the reason of the Kremlin rulers.

Of course this was known to the top state and Party activists in the satellite countries. While fighting against Gomułka, Moczar had to improve his standing in Moscow. His position was not the strongest because the nationalist rhetoric in the vassal communist parties, even if used as a tool, was associated with the unreliable Ceausescu and evoked distrust. In Poland in July 1968, when Gomułka tried to tone down the March rhetoric, Politburo member Stefan Jędrychowski said, "Nationalism may have different faces, but at the end it always shows its anti-Soviet talons." The Kremlin listened carefully to such words.

Therefore Moczar needed his own narrative to find an ear in Moscow. The display of vigilance that allowed him to discover the vile tentacles of Trotskyism in Poland was well suited for that. Trotskyism was not a safe subject for communist Poland. Whereas fighting with internal opposition was the domain of the SB, Trotskyism prompted an allergic reaction by the KGB as it was considered a common threat to the entire Soviet empire. In our case, Moczar's MSW not only was able to demonstrate its own vigilance but also revealed the lack of vigilance by the Party leadership, who was treating our rebellion as an internal problem and had not noticed the Trotskyist plague.

For that reason the MSW scenario did not find acceptance among the Party leadership as in fact it was directed against them. The Kremlin's favor was at stake, and the rivals were the highest-ranking Polish kingpins. From their perspective, Kuroń and Modzelewski together with their judges seemed insignificant and powerless pawns in the play of giants. But the matter was not so simple—unexpectedly the judges of the Warsaw District Court complicated the fight within the Party.

Now that the internal SB documents have been made accessible, it is possible to reconstruct the behind-the-scenes fight related to our trials. In April 1965 the General Prosecutor's Office and the MSW adopted a common platform. It demanded that we be sentenced for Trotskyism, not because of the facts but because of propaganda needs. "Putting Modzelewski and Kuroń on trial [for the 'Open Letter'] without showing their close ties to the Fourth International and to Badowski and Hass will have a negative political effect by creating the appearance that they are being tried for their 'convictions,' whereas in fact they were acting on the inspiration of powers hostile to the People's Republic of Poland."[16]

This did not convince the Party Secretariat. The head of the Education Department, Andrzej Werblan, communicated an Ideological Commission directive to the General Prosecutor's Office. It read, "The political platform developed by Modzelewski and Kuroń in their so-called 'Program,' and repeated in their 'Open Letter' is an attempt to unify the revisionist views present in Poland during the last decade. [. . .] In this sense they should not be portrayed as Fourth International 'agents' in Poland, but as the bearers of revisionist views who because of isolation within their own milieu, contacted the Fourth International." We were tried in line with this directive. Hass, Badowski, and Śmiech had a separate trial for the distribution of the program of the Fourth International imported to Poland from Belgium. It was a pure political coincidence that each of us was only judged for things we actually did. There was nothing special about the judges who tried us in 1965; they were simply executing someone else's decisions.

Three years later in the spring of 1968 the power balance at the top of the Party was different. Moczar's people in the secret police and Prosecutor's Office were much stronger than in 1965, and they could act independently. In May 1968 Prosecutor Pietrasiński accused Kuroń and me of initiating the March youth protests ("leading a secret organization") along with a charge from Article 5 of the mkk, that in order to harm communist Poland, we had "acted in concert with the foreign organization 'Fourth International' which is hostile toward the People's Republic of Poland."[17] The latter charge was rehashed and relied entirely on files from the previous trial. The MSW and the Prosecutor's Office wanted to push through the same scenario that they previously were not allowed.

But something was going on behind the scenes, apparently both way above our heads and in the Fourth Penal Division of the Warsaw District Court. The trial, initially scheduled for September 2, 1968, was postponed. The case was split up: Jacek Kuroń and I were to be tried first, then the students (Adam Michnik, Henryk Szlajfer, Barbara Toruńczyk, and Wiktor Górecki), and finally Antoni Zambrowski. Zambrowski's charges were unrelated to the student revolt, even if initially he was supposed to be tried together with the principal March suspects because the orchestrators of the propaganda campaign needed his name in that particular context.

When our team of judges was announced, my lawyer, Tadeusz de Virion, told me, "Karol, we have the best team in the Warsaw District Court." He was referring to the outstanding professionalism of the judges, and the respect they enjoyed in the legal community. The team consisted of the head of the Fourth Penal Department, Wiesław Sikorski; Judge Stanisław Sokół of the same department; and Andrzej Deptuła, a young judge from the Warsaw County Court, not quite thirty but considered a rising star. De Virion was intrigued because the assignment of judges in such a case was undoubtedly a political decision.

The trial began on January 2, 1969. I immediately noticed that the presiding judge was missing his right arm. He tucked the empty sleeve of his robe in his pocket. The lawyers explained to me that as a young man Sikorski was a Home Army soldier and lost his arm during the Warsaw Uprising. Now he was judging the opponents of the regime. I think he was a Party member and his position was strong—otherwise he would not have become the head of the most important department in the Warsaw District Court. I do not know if (or how) Judge Sikorski consulted with the Central Committee on our case. If he did, he had informal or perhaps indirect communication, with no trace in the archives. Officially courts in communist Poland were independent, even if nobody believed this (especially for political cases), but appearances were maintained.

Judge Sikorski probably realized that the accusation of links with the Fourth International was controversial at the Party top, and he understood that these differences of opinions between politicians provided some space for the court to maneuver. The judges had no doubt that the accusation from Article 5 of the mkk was contradicted by key evidence and could not withstand a trial without blatant stretching of the law. But they did not want to hit the prosecution with an acquittal, so they found a Solomonian solution—they dismissed this part of the case by using so-called claim preclusion (*res iudicata*). They argued that the same evidence had already been evaluated in a binding court decision in 1965, and at that time the court did not find our actions criminal. A reconsideration of the same circumstances on the basis of the same evidence would violate the principle of *ne bis in idem* (not being tried twice for the same thing). Prosecutor Pietrasiński argued his best by claiming that in 1965 the court could issue the sentence only within the frames presented by the prosecutor at that time. However, in the justification of the sentence, Judge Sikorski pointed out Pietrasiński’s lack of knowledge of the basic rules of court procedure—he reminded him that the court is not bound by the prosecutor and evaluates evidence independently. If the evaluation made by the court in 1965 was inadequate in the prosecutor’s opinion, “he was obliged to appeal it, and seek to change the verdict.” As Sikorski was saying this, he was looking with mischievous satisfaction at Pietrasiński, who had accused us in 1965 and in 1968.

Discarding the accusation of plotting with the Fourth International allowed the court to issue a much lesser sentence than required by mkk Article 5 (a minimum of five years in prison; the prosecution asked for eight for me). The fact that the prosecution's shortcomings ended the propaganda campaign to portray us as agents of foreign and secret powers was equally important. Still, the stun gun of Trotskyism (especially handy because almost nobody in Poland understood it) occasionally turned up in the official press, and even today it appears in far-right niche publications. It hardly resonated then and does not resonate now.

Our judges also undermined the leading motive of the March propaganda, the claim that the student protests were inspired by Roman Zambrowski, Stefan Staszewski, and other Party dignitaries who had been sidelined by the "healthy powers" within the PZPR and who were anxious to return to their positions.[18] In order to make this credible, Zambrowski's son Antoni initially was to be tried together with Kuroń, Michnik, and me in a single trial, even if the prosecution was not able to demonstrate that he participated in the "March events." His charges were lending his friends banned books and a false accusation of expressing Zionist views that defamed the Polish nation. The court decision to have three separate trials removed Zambrowski from the "returning to power" scenario. And the decision that excluded Andrzej Mencwel's statement from the body of evidence also aimed at separating propaganda from justice. During the investigation, the SB tried hard to extract from the interrogated "Paratroopers" any indication of contact between them and the former First Secretary of the Warsaw Party Committee, Stefan Staszewski. But the fruits of these attempts were not reflected in the reasons for the judgment. In the depositions about Staszewski, the court did not find anything relevant to the case.

The court also resolved the clash between the defense and prosecution in a telling way during the testimony of the witness Bernard Tejkowski. In 1964 Tejkowski had participated in clandestine discussions about our program, but in the 1968 investigation he was interrogated as Antoni Zambrowski's coworker. Tejkowski supposedly heard that the son of the former KC secretary had slandered the Polish nation from a Zionist perspective. After 1964 Tejkowski developed an anti-Semitic obsession, and on these grounds he drew closer to the secret police. At the trial, prosecutor Pietrasiński asked him probing questions about Zambrowski's Zionism, but de Virion asked the court how these questions were connected with our case. Judge Sikorski shared these reservations and admonished the prosecutor harshly: "Please only ask questions related to the case." When in spite of this admonition Pietrasiński asked another question about Zambrowski's views, Sikorski used his authority: "The court disallows this question." Later the witness spontaneously answered the questions that the prosecutor was barred from asking, but the judge left no doubt that his courtroom was for a trial, not for crude propaganda.

Indeed, the reasons for sentencing Jacek Kuroń and me to three years and six months in prison were free from propaganda lies. The judges presented truthfully what happened, and the sentence was imposed by stretching the mkk definition of "leadership role in an organization which existence, objectives, or internal structure are designed to be secret from the state authorities." We acted openly, but we "did not assume a definite organizational form," which the court stated in its reasons. Nonetheless, the court found us to be a secret organization. De Virion confessed to me that for the first time in his career he would not be able to write in his appeal that the court had not found the material truth, but only that it violated the principle *nullum crimen sine lege* (nothing is a crime unless prohibited by law). The judgment written by our judges would be more appropriate for acquittal. But they pronounced us guilty because they knew the country in which they lived. We too knew it, and we did not hold the verdict against them. Rather the opposite.

Judge Sikorski's court was probing the limits of its independence blindly, and it pushed them further than the political situation allowed. The court's decisions were soon curtailed. In the trial of Michnik and his colleagues presided over by Judge Sabina Pawelec, Mencwel's statement was part of the evidence, thus its status as testimony was restored. On appeal, the Supreme Court together tried the cases of Kuroń and me, Michnik and his codefendants, and Antoni Zambrowski. This enabled the press to put the name Zambrowski under the headline "Court Upholds Sentences of 'March Events' Leaders," and at least in this way kept the insinuation alive that Zambrowski (of course his father Roman) had secretly instigated the student revolt. The Supreme Court also decided that Kuroń and I had committed our crimes as recidivists (Article 60, paragraph 1 of the Penal Code). The length of our sentences was not changed, but our status as recidivists excluded us from the expected amnesty in celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of communist Poland. This amnesty was indeed announced in July 1969, but we still were to serve our three and a half years in prison, and the "unsuspended" parts of our first sentences as well, as the penitentiary courts had revoked our conditional release granted in 1967. All in all my second prison term was to be four years and seven months—from March 8, 1967, to October 23, 1972, unless I was conditionally released again. But I would not be eligible for this until September 1971 at the earliest.

THE COMMUNITY UNDER LOCK AND KEY

The Third Unit was physically located in the Warsaw First Central Prison on Rakowiecka Street in Mokotów. It differed socially from the rest of the Mokotów units, not to mention the entire system of penitentiary institutions in communist Poland. I soon realized that a sentence was a pass to true prison. In November 1965, after the Supreme Court confirmed my first three and a half years, I was taken to the Barczewo Penal Institution near Olsztyn. This was a former monastery converted into a prison by Erich Koch, the Nazi Gauleiter for East Prussia.[19] By a turn of fate, Koch himself had been in the Barczewo prison for many years with a death sentence by a Polish court. He was never executed "because of poor health," and he died in Barczewo in 1986. I never saw him because he was kept in a solitary cell in so-called quarantine next to the prison gate, and they never brought him to the general bullpen we could see from our cells.

I was greeted in Barczewo by another kind of attraction. Two or three days after my arrival, the warden took me to the educator (that is, officer of the prison guard who supervised the unit) of Unit 7 where I was initially placed. The educator was a fat phlegmatic screw called Lieutenant Mucha.

"You know Modzelewski," he said haughtily with faint boredom, "I don't care about your crime. That's your business. But you're educated, therefore you have a conscience. While here, you know, there are criminals with no conscience. They don't respect anything." Here he raised his bushy eyebrows, "Even prison regulations. So you understand, if you see something, come and tell me."

Never before or since have I been asked to inform. This did not even occur to the SB. Initially I was speechless, and then I responded pompously.

"Sir, this would be contrary to my principles."

Lieutenant Mucha looked at me disdainfully—I was supposedly educated but clearly clueless. He decided to enlighten me.

"Modzelewski, you're wrong. This would not be contrary to your principles."

Lieutenant Mucha was correct about one thing. Most of my new colleagues were common criminals—thieves, hoodlums, or even bandits—and they did not respect prison regulations. Neither did they respect the penal code, personal property, or the physical inviolability of individuals. This does not mean they had no norms or their own unwritten code. The separation of political prisoners and criminal prisoners was introduced only during martial law. During my earlier prison stints in 1965–1967 and 1968–1971, common criminals were my milieu—we lived together and worked in the same prison factories. I do not regret this experience.

When I served my sentences, prison regulations permitted an inmate to write only individual complaints. Collective complaints were strictly prohibited, and in fact they were regarded as rebellion. Inmates were also prohibited to plead on behalf of another inmate who was being mistreated. An inmate only could write on his own behalf and for his own case. Solidarity among inmates was to be eliminated, and all unregulated social relations wiped out. The criminal world was pathogenic by nature, therefore it was necessary to prevent the forming of a community. How this antisocial model was supposed to be reconciled with declared resocialization remains the secret of the authors of these regulations.

Of course the response of imprisoned criminals to this systemic disintegration imposed on them was to close ranks. They reached for proven patterns of criminal subculture, often based on traditional thieves' customs that eventually were codified inside prisons. This subculture was called "grypsera," which literally means criminal slang. But it also exists as a complex system of norms, patterns, and rituals regulating the life of the prison community. Today inmates are divided into “grypsujący” and “niegrypsujący” [conforming and not conforming to the “grypsera”]. During my time, “grypsujący” were in the majority. Instead of “grypsujący,” they were simply described as “men” or “real men,” while “niegrypsujący” were called “losers.” The line between “losers” and “prison whores” was blurry, but there was a wall between “men” and “losers.”

These terms and divisions are best understood in terms of cultural anthropology. Archaic tribes often define themselves—as opposed to outsiders—with a word that simply means “people.” This community of “us” versus “them” is one of communication—it is united and distinct because of specific language. My prison education began by learning this specific language.

To the criminals in Barczewo I was an alien from another planet. First, I was an intellectual, therefore possibly an “apropak” (a mocking term derived from the French *à propos*, which was overused by the provincial “intelligentsia” who tried to impress the criminal “plebs”). But it turned out that I was not an “apropak,” and I did not try to impress anyone. Then the word spread that I was a political prisoner. In 1965 my case was not widely known; there was only a short note in the press about my sentence. But the prison bush telegraph worked, and it became known that I was in for fighting the regime. This elevated me in the eyes of my fellow prisoners-criminals. They all ascribed aspects of struggle against the system to their conflicts with the law (and society). In the Wołów prison for recidivists where I served my second term, I saw political statements tattooed on my criminal colleagues. One of them had a moving confession on his feet, “Communism broke my life.” Antek P., an exceptionally bright pickpocket and recidivist from Wałbrzych with a fine sense of humor, had a tattoo in two rows on his forehead, “In Poland there is no justice; terror, lies and duplicity rule.” Antek was also famous because when he was dragged to solitary, he bit a warden on his calf. Because of his scandalous tattoo he was allowed to keep his hair (the standard regime required shaved heads). Antek was ordered to wear bangs, but when requested, he would lift them and proudly show his slogan.

From my first days in Barczewo I enjoyed—initially unknowingly—kindness from the criminals who patiently taught me their ABCs without requiring that I comply. Nobody told or instructed them to do this. A remarkable characteristic of prison subculture is that it runs automatically without any organizational structure. Władek B. was my first “grypsera” teacher, a hoodlum from Zatorze in Olsztyn. He tactfully explained that I needed to avoid some words commonplace on the outside but considered offensive in prison. Therefore certain notions were expressed with substitute phrases or words. For instance, the word “daj” (“you give”) is offensive—instead you should say “kopsnij” or “podkopsaj.” You should not say “posuń się” (“make room for”)—you should say “przesuń się” (“move to the side”); and in no circumstances should you call someone “pretty.” A real man cannot be “pretty” but is “handsome.” Saying the word “kochany” (“dear”) is a serious offense for which you could be beaten. You also never call someone “dobry” (“good”) but “w porządku” (“all right”). Instead of “dobrze” (“well”) we say “git,” and instead of “pociąg” (“train”) “tragacz” (“dragger”).

I quickly realized that this was a system of linguistic taboos covering up an obsession with sex. “Ładny” (“pretty”) meant that someone should be fucked, and “daj” (“give me”) meant “daj dupy” (“let me fuck you in the ass”). “Kochany” (“darling”) meant fucked, that is, “przecwelony.”[20] Under no circumstances should you address someone as “kochany.” A “cwel” (“cocksucker’) was the opposite of a man—a victim of rape, a lowly object of homosexual practices who lived at the outer edge of degradation. A “cwel” was like an untouchable in India. Physical contact with a “cwel,” unless connected with sexual exploitation, would degrade a careless man. It could “skiepszczyć,” or permanently defile a man, and as a result exclude him from manhood. A “cwel” did not eat together with men at a table—he took his bowl and spoon and sat on the can (toilet bucket) to eat. You should not hit him with your hand lest you defile yourself. You could hit him with a “lola,” that is, a broomstick, or even better, with the board that lay on the edge of the can. You could kick a “cwel,” but only if you wore a shoe. You could talk with a “cwel,” but only to order him to sweep the cell or to set the price for sexual services (usually two packs of cigarettes). If you “nawijasz” (that is, talk) with a “cwel” like a human being, you run the risk of being excluded yourself.

This sounds terrible but did not occur all that often. I spent several years in prisons and countless cells, and not once was there a “cwel” among my cellmates. Neither did I witness a “cwel” being raped or physically tortured. You can say I was lucky because I did not have to test my courage. Andrzej Czuma was in such an extreme situation.[21] His cellmates were about to rape a young weakling. Czuma took the “lola” and announced that he would defend the unlucky fellow. “I am a Christian, and I can’t let a weaker person be hurt in my presence.” The rapists-to-be let it go, not so much out of fear of Czuma but out of respect for his determination. Probably also because he was a political prisoner for whom much is forgiven. I do not know if Czuma was fully aware what he was risking. In any case, regardless of the many twists and turns of his later political career, he forever earned my deep respect.

Wojtek K., a young man from Sosnowiec who served a term (not his first) for robbery, was one of my Wołów cellmates. Despite his dangerous specialty, he did not look like a bandit. He was lean, physically rather delicate, psychologically fragile, intelligent, and sensitive. Of course he conformed to “grypsera,” but he did not look terribly brutal to me. We worked together in a crew in the metal-processing factory, a small shop within the prison. I operated a table drill, and Wojtek a metal grinder. The crew was fluid—people were transferred, moved, or released. New prisoners replaced them, sometimes brought from distant prisons. If there was a “cwel” among them, no transfer could free him from the stigma that followed him from prison to prison.

One day such a newcomer brought a wheelbarrow filled with parts to our unit. He delivered his load, paused for a moment to rest, and started talking with the other prisoners. My sensitive and delicate friend Wojtek looked at him. His face changed. He approached the newcomer, and said icily, “Ty się do człowieka pucujesz?” (that is, are you telling us you’re a man?) Everybody fell silent. The veins on the fellow’s head swelled as if he wanted to stand his ground, but after a moment he deflated and left without a word. On the surface nothing had happened, nobody was touched, and no curse was uttered. But there was an intense cruelty to this scene.

My prison mates of course knew what I thought about rape and the treatment of “cwels,” but they covered our differences about this with silence. However, in the final days of my stint in Wołów my good friend

Wojtek K. made a racy joke. This was in mid-September of 1971. I was summoned to the so-called *wokanda*, that is, before the parole board that handed me my conditional release. I was not surprised. A few days earlier I had received a wire from my mother with the news that Kuroń also was conditionally released. These were my last days in Wołów, and Wojtek made a kind of farewell speech. "Karol, you 'wyklepujesz' [that is, are being released]. You are a recidivist, but you have some serious shortcomings. You have not yet been sent to the 'kabaryna' [that is, solitary confinement]. Well, we won't make you go there. But you don't have a pattern! We can 'wydziargać' [tattoo] a 'gwiazda recydywy' [a recidivist's star, a symbolic image similar to a compass rose] on your knee, or on the wrist where people wear watches. Nobody will see what you have under your watch. Well, if you don't want one, that's too bad. But you've never fucked a 'cwel'! We'll bring you one, a very pretty one. Maybe you don't want to spare two 'pakulce' [two packs of cigarettes]? Don't worry, we'll cover this for you!" I had no doubt Wojtek was joking, but I still felt uneasy.

My criminal friends with whom I talked about prison rape and the treatment of "cwels" tried to justify these practices. They emphasized that it was not just a simple situation of "might makes right" but a specific kind of justice. A "real man" would not be raped—such an act would disqualify the perpetrators. It sometimes happens that somebody who lacks the courage to stand his ground is raped (but then he is not a "real man"). You bow before courage, even if it is shown by someone weaker than you. Violence and rape as such are applied as communal repression to someone who breaks the community's basic principles, for instance, someone who informs on prisoners, gives away his partners in court, or otherwise puts himself on the side of the state repression apparatus. According to this interpretation, undoubtedly beautified, "przecwelenie" (turning someone into a "cwel") or "skiepszczenie" (breaking someone) was a punishment given to traitors by the criminal community.

I regarded these explanations as an idealization, but they contained a grain of truth. From January 1966 to August 3, 1967, I worked in the wood processing factory, that is, a furniture-making shop in the Barczewo prison. A certain Stanisław W. worked with me. He was a young man who after "przezgredzenie" (that is, aging out at twenty-one) was moved there from the juvenile prison in Iława. In Barczewo there were quite a few such “przezgredzeni” from Iława; they all used “grypsera” religiously and stayed tight. But Stanisław W. strayed—he fell to career temptation. He was advanced to foreman, and it went to his head. He became intoxicated with power, started looking down on his friends, and wrote disciplinary reports about a few of them. This turned out to be too much, and they taught him a lesson.

First his cellmates invited him to boxing matches and regularly beat him up. When he was brought to the rehabilitation officer who asked why he had a black eye or bloody nose, Stanisław would answer in compliance with the prisoners’ code that he fell out of bed. But he already was beyond help. The beatings occurred more and more often, and then they turned into stroking and caressing his butt. One evening between roll call and putting out the “cube,” his cellmates pretended that they were preparing for rape. Deathly afraid, Stanisław dashed out to the corridor with his “cube” and refused to return to the cell. The warden had seen this before. He told the others to pack up Stanisław’s belongings and bring them to the corridor. Stanisław was moved one flight down to the unit for nonworking prisoners. We saw him through the window taking a walk with this unit. In the large prison yard prisoners walked in pairs by regulation. But Stanisław was walking by himself. Nobody wanted to walk or talk with him. He already was being treated like a “cwel.” He had not been raped yet, but already he was “skiepszczony”—excluded. His future was bleak.

This example shows how community repression functions in prison subculture. This was not a “dintojra,” a secret criminal court known from prewar times. During my time in prison in communist Poland there were no kangaroo courts or “grypsera” decision-making bodies. Everything happened automatically, like a leaderless ritual dance, because everybody knew the rules and how he should act (or at least what he should do). Nobody told Stanisław’s young cellmates to scare him and make him defenseless. They knew that they could and even should punish him, and how. The “grypsera” subculture disciplined more effectively than any formal organization, and collective repression from the community evoked fear. Prison colleagues could help or save you when in trouble and provide you with a sense of self-esteem. Yet they treated traitors and apostates ruthlessly. It is good to remember that the predecessors of the Neapolitan Camorra were prison criminal subcultures extolled by the nineteenth-century Italian patriots who saw in them a folk ally in their struggle against the oppressor.

Yet nothing in this is simple or unambiguous. The prison is an institution determined by a totalitarian “genotype.” It does not originate in twentieth-century totalitarian regimes but is a product of nineteenth-century penitentiary thought and European liberal practices. The principle that all relationships between inmates needed to be destroyed, leaving only the hierarchical relationships that subjected inmates to supervisors, was not invented in communist Poland. Michel Foucault astutely analyzed the birth of this idea in nineteenth-century England and France. It was to be civilized society’s answer to the pathological behavior of criminals. But to some extent this answer mirrors what it supposes to combat.

Prison personnel must have at their disposal a catalog of disciplinary measures to elicit (to put it delicately) prisoners’ obedience. These measures were listed in the regulations: canceling walks (normally thirty minutes a day); revoking food parcel privileges (during my time a prisoner was entitled to three parcels a year); canceling “wypiska” or the right to purchase small amounts of food, cigarettes, and toiletries in the canteen; canceling family visits and correspondence (essentially two letters and one half-hour visit per month); “kabaryna” (“hard bed”), that is, a solitary cell without a mattress and pillow for up to fourteen days; and lock up in a solitary cell for up to three months (this required confirmation by a penitentiary court). On top of these, the administration had “extraordinary security measures” to tame prisoners who resisted. These included straightjackets and straps to bind a prisoner to a bed that usually had no mattress.

The humanitarianism of these penalties, as well as the means of physical enforcement, is dubious. Still, the devil is in the details, that is, in the way that the repression permitted by the regulations was implemented. Theoretically the “kabaryna” was to be a solitary cell with no mattress—but the regulations said nothing about how this cell was to be heated. And if there was nothing in writing, the prison guard would fill in the blanks. The “kabaryna” was usually placed on the first floor where the heating was the worst. In addition, the window was placed near the ceiling. It opened from the outside and could not be closed from the inside. So in the winter the wardens would make sure there was plenty of fresh air in the “kabaryna.” Prisoners would shiver all night with no mattress and their clothes outside in the “cube.” No one ever returned healthy.

Theoretically the straightjacket was intended to immobilize an unruly and aggressive prisoner. In practice however, it was used for corporal punishment or even torture. The wardens tightened the arms over the stomach to cause gastric discomfort, or worse, involuntary defecation. Often so-called *podogonie* was applied—the prisoner’s hands were twisted behind his back, and the straightjacket sleeves were pulled between his legs; then he was tied to the window bars so that he had to stand on his tiptoes. When he got tired and slumped, the weight of his body caused the sleeves to squeeze his balls. Once in Wołów, when working a morning shift in the metal-working shop, I heard a rhythmic heart-wrenching moan over the buzz of the machine. Antek P. (the dissident with a tattoo on his forehead) explained to me matter of factly that someone in a “podogonie” was screaming. “Don’t pay any attention, he will faint in a moment.” Indeed, the moans soon ceased.

In the 1960s (until 1967) the Wołów penitentiary was well known as a place of extreme torture. A large group of “exceptionally resistant’” young recidivists was placed there. For their expedited reeducation, Governor M., nicknamed “Nero” by the prisoners, resorted to the so-called self-government system that had been tested in Nazi concentration camps. It consisted of supervisor-prisoners appointed by the prison administration placed between the wardens and the juvenile recidivists. The supervisors were adult bullies belonging to the category of “frajerzy” (douchebags). They were armed with wooden batons and told to keep order. I do not know who thought of collective gymnastics as a way to torture the “grypsera” juveniles. The beefy “self-government” bullies oversaw peculiar physical exercises. The juveniles were led to the prison yard and forced to do leap frogs while holding toilet buckets filled with water in their outstretched hands. If they refused to jump, stopped in the middle, or spilled water, the supervisors beat them severely. The beatings were often followed by the “kabaryna,” or a straightjacket. In that case the executors were of course not the “self-government” prisoners but a special warden detachment called a “naboja” or “atanda.”

Much depended on the attitude of the prison’s administration. Significant changes occurred in Wołów at the end of 1967. The prison governor M. left, the teenagers were moved out, “self-government” was disbanded, and everything returned to prison routine. That is, beatings still occurred, but they were a response to aggressive behavior of prisoners. My colleague Ziutek F., a foreman in the metal shop, got drunk on denatured alcohol. We locked him in a cubicle to sober up, but he broke loose and started roaming all over the shop. A warden tried to take him back to his cell (“you are sick,” he said), but Ziutek punched him in the face, and the warden’s cap with the eagle fell on the ground. The “naboja” was called in and they dragged Ziutek to the “karcer” and beat him quite severely. When Ziutek sobered up, he was glad they had beaten him because he thought this would be the end of the matter. But he was taken before a court and got an additional year and a half in prison. In this situation prisoners were not surprised by violence from the prison guard.

There were also prisons with no beatings. When I was in Barczewo, I did not hear about a single prisoner beaten by the wardens there. This practice was enforced by the prison governor, Czaja, who had returned to Poland from France. He was honest with a strong sense of justice and understood prison service as a mission to reeducate. Before he came to Barczewo, he was a supervisor in a juvenile detention center in Iława. When prisoners in Iława turned twenty-one, they were no longer considered juveniles and would be transferred. Many of the prisoners in my ward and in the furniture factory came from Iława. They all used the “grypsera”; they would never call a warden anything other than a “gad” (reptile), but they spoke of Czaja with respect. I had the opportunity to find out that their respect was well earned.

Among my prison mates in Barczewo was twenty-three-year-old Zdzisław Ślączka, a son of a teacher from Katowice, serving time for breaking and entering. His sentence (four and a half years) was long because of special circumstances. Zdzisław, a first-year mathematics student, was fed up with his boring everyday life and decided to jazz it up. He talked several of his friends—sons of Katowice Party honchos—into his idea. Together they carefully scouted out large shops and warehouses (naturally state owned) to individually tailor a burglary technique for each. Then they stole and sold the goods. When they were spotted and arrested, the well-connected parents quickly rescued their offspring, and Zdzisław, who was seen as the instigator, took the fall for the entire gang.

Mathematics was not Zdzisław's vocation. He clearly had a talent and interest in the humanities, as well as the arts (later he created metal art). When he learned that I had some books by prominent sociologists (including *Wizje ludzkiego świata* [*Visions of a Human World*] by Zygmunt Bauman and *Elita władzy* [*The Power Elite*] by Charles W. Mills), he borrowed and thoroughly read them, and then we discussed them. This prompted him to borrow scholarly histories, rather than popular novels, from the prison library. He would bring a university textbook on ancient history to work, and during breaks he would sit in a corner and read. We walked to the shop directly from our ward through a connecting corridor where we were subjected to a cursory search. One day Zdzisław's book drew the attention of the officer nicknamed "Blady Julek" ("Pale Julek").

"What have we here? Well, well, Mashkin, *Historia starożytnego Rzymu* [*The History of Ancient Rome*]. Ślączka, who you trying to outsmart?"

"You, sir," answered Zdzisław calmly.

"Blady Julek" turned red, but he did not know what to say. Finally he raised his voice.

"Don't stare at me!"

Without a word Zdzisław turned his back to face the wall and raised his hands. This was how prisoners had to stand when an officer entered a cell during Stalinist times. "Blady Julek" remembered this from his own experience, as he likely already had worked as a warden for several years. In any case, he yelled furiously, "I'm reporting you!"

That meant a request for punishment submitted to the governor. In his report "Blady Julek" described the exchange and gestures as intentionally offending an officer. The thick textbook by Mashkin was added to the report as evidence.

Governor Czaja read the report, asked Zdzisław to describe the incident, and figured out the facts. Then he returned the book to the culprit, and said, "This time I am not punishing you. In the future do not bring books to work, but read them in your cell. And keep in mind that not every officer has a sense of humor."

Zdzisław not only read serious books but also wrote poetry. One of his poems was about the death penalty and contained these words that caused some trouble for him:

A hangman with no conscience,
A judge with clean hands,
And a criminal-governor
Whose conscience torments him.

The wardens found the notebook with Zdzisław's poems and included it in their report with a request for punishment. Zdzisław reported to Governor Czaja.

"What is this? You think I am a criminal?"

"Sir, this is a poem against the death penalty. You know that a governor must be present at all executions."

"But the death penalty is legal in Poland," said Czaja.

"Governor, sir, is one allowed to kill someone?"

"Well, no," admitted Czaja.

"So if you can't kill—there should be no exceptions."

Czaja sighed, gave the notebook back to Zdzisław, and said the sacramental formula, "This time I am not punishing you." And he added after a pause, "But watch what you write."

This was sound advice in communist Poland.

One also needed to watch what one said. In mid-1966 the "wypiska" in our ward was badly delayed because of some administrative issues. We worked the second shift, and if we were not taken to the canteen by noon, we were finding daily that shopping was canceled. This was hard on smokers who then were a large majority. We smoked up all the tobacco dug out from butts saved for a rainy day. We broke into the first aid kit and stole the entire supply of mint, persuading ourselves it was menthol tobacco. Tensions were mounting, and finally a strike broke out without any forethought. One day we were taken as usual through the connecting corridor to the shop, but once there we did not change from our prison uniforms into work clothes but stood immobile. The convoy commander (as the older of the two wardens who watched us during work was called pompously), Sergeant Karol Wójcik, warned us that a strike is considered a rebellion and he would have to call his supervisors from the Security Unit. This of course did not work, and my cellmate Bronek K., a peasant from the village of Myszki in the Piska Forest, replied indignantly that no smoker could be expected to work when he was going crazy. The others were silent.

The head of the Security Unit ran up. He started yelling that there would be severe punishment, and then he demanded that Sergeant Wójcik identify the leaders. Wójcik responded truthfully that there were no leaders, it was just that nobody had started working. The head of security screamed, "What kind of commander are you if you can't name the leaders?"

Then he demanded to know who was complaining the loudest. Wójcik turned pale, was silent for a moment, and finally said Bronek's name. Bronek was immediately escorted to the governor. However, we were told to form two lines and were led to the canteen. Bronek eventually joined us and bought what he needed. Governor Czaja understood the situation—he did not punish Bronek but sent him to the canteen.

This of course did not mean that Czaja never punished. One of the prisoners went nuts and cursed out the wardens. He got fourteen days in the "kabaryna," along with three months of solitary confinement (the penitentiary court upheld the punishment). But when he was in solitary and the wardens confiscated his English self-study guide and then accused him of resisting, Czaja gave his tattered book back, saying, "A prisoner has the right to self-educate. We will not punish this."

A sense of justice was a great virtue for a prison governor, but strict adherence to regulations had its good and bad sides. In Barczewo we were fed relatively well—considering the modest prison allowances—because Czaja made sure that nobody stole from us in the kitchen. But in other areas our life was subjected to stiff regulations. This was very limiting and hard to bear. In this respect things were better in Wołów after "Nero's" repressive regime when the hardened recidivists managed to effectively loosen the prison practice and make everyday existence more bearable than prescribed by the letter of the regulations.

Barczewo was a maximum security prison for first-time offenders. Therefore I did not meet anyone there who had been in Wołów, which was a prison for recidivists. Wołów was mentioned in Barczewo in fearful hushed tones: "Wołów means solitary!" The scary legend of a place of torture governed by bloodthirsty "Nero" circulated throughout all prisons in communist Poland.

At the end of May 1969 the Supreme Court upheld my second three and a half years, and I was moved from Mokotów prison. Nine of us were put in a "bitch," that is, a truck for transporting prisoners. We could hear the driver discussing the route—we were taken to different places. One of the stops was Wołów. In talking to my travel companions it turned out that I was the only one with a second sentence. I realized that I was heading for Wołów, and I became frightened.

When we arrived, the prisoner in the warehouse who took my clothes and issued me jail attire explained soothingly, "This is no longer the same Wołów." But then he looked at my paperwork and warned me that I was going to a particularly bad ward—3-D, the solitary cells. I was put in a cell 1.3 meters wide. It contained a cot with a straw mattress, a small table and stool, a cupboard on the wall, a bucket with water, and a tin john (there was no plumbing). There was no loudspeaker.

After a short time, the door opened and a lieutenant entered (he was obviously from the Security Unit). He asked me in a cajoling way, "Modzelewski, how are you doing?"

I answered that I did not know because I had only been there a few minutes. I asked why I was in solitary confinement, because the governor had not given me such a penalty, not to mention that it was not confirmed by the penitentiary court. The lieutenant explained that this was not a punishment but a temporary placement, just for a few days.

"But hang on—you would be much better off in a cell by yourself, of course not here, but one flight up in 4-D. Those are light duty solitary cells assigned by the governor upon a prisoner's request."

I realized that the administration of the Wołów Penitentiary was more scared of me than I was of them, and I was no longer afraid. I protested that it is hard to be locked up in a solitary cell, so why would I request it.

"You know there are criminal prisoners here."

"Who do you think I was with in Barczewo?"

"But these are recidivists!" He kept trying to scare me.

That was it. I reached for my paperwork, pulled out the Supreme Court sentence, and showed him.

"See Article 60, paragraph 1. I am also a recidivist."

He was heartbroken. The task assigned to him by his supervisors seemed to be impossible. I needed to help him, especially because I had my own gain in view.

“Unless . . .” I started as if pondering something deeply.

“That’s right, unless . . .” the lieutenant picked up with hope.

“You know,” I explained, “before I was imprisoned for the first time I worked at the university. I know there is a library here, but it is unlikely to have the books I need. So if I could have them sent to me from home, then the solitary cell, even if hard to bear, would make sense. At least I would not waste my time.”

“So you see,” the lieutenant was beaming, “write to the governor to request the solitary placement as well as permission to receive a package of books.”

I wrote at once, and I compiled a list of books that would keep me busy for some time: five volumes of works by Stanisław Ossowski, Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz, and Leszek Kołakowski. The next day I was moved one flight up. The cell was exactly the same as my “temporary” one, except it had a loudspeaker that I immediately turned off. On the outside of the door was a sign that read “Cell elder Modzelewski, Karol, son of Zygmunt.” It almost looked like a memorial plaque, and it meant that I had to supervise myself.

I was taken out to the walking yard. It was fenced with wire netting as opposed to a wall, and compared to the few square meters next to the Mokotów Third Unit, it was a comfortable size. I counted my paces; each round was about 150 meters. On two sides there were pavilions perpendicular to each other. I saw the faces of prisoners in every window curiously watching this dangerous man who had to walk by himself. Behind the fence there was a kitchen shack. A prisoner sat in front peeling potatoes. When I passed him for the first time, he asked, “From Warsaw?”

I nodded. The second time he wanted to confirm it.

“For the riots?”

“Yes.”

The third time, “Modzelewski?”

The bush telegraph was fast. I nodded again. Then he made a comment, “That was good, but not enough. Those red spiders need a good beating.”

It was now clear why the administration of this notorious prison was afraid of me. The March propaganda had made me famous in every Polish prison. This granted me authority among the prisoners from the moment I entered, and if I wanted, I could raise quite a commotion. The official propaganda demonized me. A prison governor might not entirely believe the propaganda, but caution never hurts. Here is someone who incited students all over Poland—who knows, he may try to rile the prisoners. Better be careful and keep him separate.

Isolation has its benefits. The most important ones for me were books and the extraordinary environment for intellectual work in my cell—but also being able to take a shower by myself. Usually the entire ward was taken for showers, with four or five men to one shower head. After soaping up, you had to wait in line to rinse. I had all fourteen showers to myself. The situation was not as good for physical activities. Every few weeks all Ward 4-D inmates were taken to the gym, that is, all except me. I complained, pointed to the regulations, and was successful. The regimen was relaxed. From then on I went to the game room, the shower, and for daily walks together with the ward. But I stayed in my isolation cell for another year.

A few days after I arrived, a prisoner who worked in the prison office came to my cell door. He knocked quietly and in a low voice told me that there was a note in my file sent with me from Warsaw, reading, “Recommend hard physical labor.” It looked like a doctor’s prescription, but of course it came from the secret police. The prison administration waited to implement this recommendation for four months, until they were sure I would not start a mutiny. Finally they took me to the governor. The notorious “Nero” had been gone for two years. The governor was Colonel Karasiński, a calm and reasonable man. He wore the badge of the First Division of the Polish Army on his uniform. This meant that he had left the Soviet Union with General Berling’s army, and he had been enlisted by my father. During our conversation Karasiński was accompanied by the head of the Penitentiary Unit, a major.

“Modzelewski, you know that prisoners must work,” the governor began.

“I know, sir.”

“We have no suitable work for you here. We have a metal shop, but what could you do there?”

"Sir, I have no skills," I admitted honestly. "The only thing I could do is to work as a porter."

"But that is hard physical work," the governor warned, but his eyes sparkled.

"I know, sir. I worked as a porter for the wood shop in Barczewo. I will manage. There is only one problem. You assigned me a solitary cell so that I have quiet to read my scholarly books. Those who work in the metal shop are housed in Ward C, and there are no solitary cells there."

"Yes, that is right. You see, major," the governor turned to the head of the Penitentiary Unit. "Modzelewski works . . . works . . ." he finally found the words he was looking for, "he works on furthering himself. OK then, every morning the warden will take you from your cell to Ward 4-C where you will have roll call and go to work with everybody else. After work you will return to your cell."

This was an ideal solution for me. In prison, except for the bad food, I was most troubled by the lack of movement and fresh air. Psychologically, I was troubled by the lack of contact with people on one hand, and on the other hand by the inability to concentrate on my books and notes. For the next six months I was among people from 6:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. (nearly two hundred prisoners worked the first shift) in continuous movement, of which at least two hours were outside the shop in fresh air. This was in fact hard physical labor, but I did not complain. After the workday I returned to my solitary cell where I led the life of a medieval monk removed from the world and completely immersed in books. I did not work on my doctorate—for this I would have needed a large library—but I tried to broaden my humanistic background, something indispensable for a historian.

Alas in May 1970, MSW officers from Warsaw came to Wołów to see if I was not too happy. I immediately learned about the inspection from the prisoners working in the prison office. The directive for "hard physical labor" ostensibly was met, but the officers were not going to buy it. "It's appalling—he's free to move about the entire shop! He earns the daily rate—that's also unacceptable. He needs to show that he is meeting quota. And his solitary cell—there are more than four square meters just for him—that's a royal accommodation!" They ordered everything to be changed. I was moved to a fourteen-person cell, a so-called barn where the noise of conversations and two loudspeakers drowned my own thoughts, and the john was only accessible twice a day—after wakeup and before evening roll call. I was assigned work at a hand-pulled lever for bending hoops inside the shop. But my books were not taken away.

I filed complaints, and my mother appealed to Minister Walczak and Governor Karasiński, and the appeal ended with a compromise. I was able to change my work assignment so that I operated a table drill that was not in the building but outside in a shed that sheltered us from rain and snow.

I got *valenki* and a *fufaika* with a band collar that I remember fondly. I made 240 percent of the quota (the plan for our brigade required this), and thus my earnings grew proportionately. A recidivist prisoner was allowed to keep only 20 percent of his earnings, but this was something. I did not return to the solitary cell, but I was moved to a three-person cell. My cellmates Wojtek K. and Rysiek L. spent two afternoons a week at the Metalwork Vocational School that was in the office building, and during these two afternoons I could "further myself." I spent the rest of my free time with my cellmates. I heard their life stories and I helped them with their schoolwork. The overall balance was like the answer to a puzzle that I learned from my fellow recidivists in Wołów—which machine won't ever kick you in the ass? Kick-ass machines made in Poland.

In prison cells and shops, I encountered common criminals who were in my same situation. We found ourselves in the cogs of a machine of repression directed against us, and we tried to stand up to it and preserve our social connections and sense of dignity. Even if in my understanding of dignity I differed from my Barczewo and Wołów colleagues, the similarity of our situations not only was conducive to empathy but also caused me to look at them through rose-colored glasses. I was aware of this. I knew that they were put in prison because of activities that society needed to combat, but this was theoretical. Much later, my work on the outside gave me a chance to touch upon the reverse side of this coin.

The 1980–1981 Solidarity revolution, the so-called carnival of freedom, could not pass without an echo in the closed world of penal institutions. The layers of aggression, suppressed hostility toward the state and its repressive apparatus, and the feeling of being wronged always accumulated among imprisoned criminals, but the combustible addition of hope and sense that the regime was teetering made it into an explosive mixture. In the spring and summer of 1981 there was a wave of riots in Polish prisons.

In the beginning of June 1981 the recidivists from the prison in Zaręba who worked in the "Konrad" copper mine in Iwiny did not surface after their shift but declared a hunger strike in a corridor 830 meters below ground. The site of their protest made it impossible to remove the strikers by force—they were next to the pump station that protected the mine from being flooded. The strikers made no threats, but it was clear that any kind of scuffle could result in a mining disaster and tragedy. There was no option but to negotiate and to use the Solidarity activists to mediate, even if until then the central administration of Polish prisons did not allow union participation in resolving prison protests.

The "Konrad" mine was part of the Legnica-Głogów Copper Basin, and within the structure of Solidarity it belonged to the Inter-Factory Founding Committee in Lubin. The committee head, Ryszard Sawicki, organized the mediation. He was a miner from the "Polkowice" mine and a smart and responsible union activist. He asked me to conduct direct negotiations because he knew I was familiar with the world of recidivists and could find a common language with the protesters. Besides, I was a member of the Presidium of the Wrocław Regional Governing Board of Solidarity, and colleagues from Wałbrzych, Lubin, Legnica, and Jelenia Góra considered Wrocław their union capital. Soon afterward we united into one Lower Silesia Region.

The demands of the protesters fell into three categories. The demands regarding working conditions were the easiest to meet and most obviously justified. In order to start work at 6:00 a.m., the prisoners had to travel for well over an hour from the prison to the mine. Then they had to change clothes, take the elevator down to level –550 (meters), and from there on conveyors down to level –830. The prisoners had breakfast in the prison at 4:00 a.m. They took snacks with them, and they had another hot meal after they returned, nearly twelve hours later. In such conditions, the physically exhausting and stressful work underground with no restorative meal was too much. They demanded a hot meal during their work day.

Their pay demands did not affect the mine's coffers but instead concerned the division of pay between the prisoners and the prison system. In a standard regimen, recidivists usually received one-fifth of their earnings with 80 percent withheld by the prison, or district and central prison administration. The prison administration could award—individually and as a bonus—a higher percentage to prisoners who had to pay child support. This was a discretionary decision. The strikers demanded that this increased sum be given to all "child supporters"—and the majority who worked in the mine had to pay child support. This bonus would improve their family situations and prevent child support debt from compounding. The prisoners also demanded that the share of earnings would be automatically increased six months before a prisoner's release. This would help him survive the initial weeks outside until he found a job and received his first paycheck. This demand deserved support because it would decrease the risk of returning to crime immediately after release, but it required negotiations with the central prison administration. It was a system-wide issue with consequences for the budget.

Finally the last and theoretically most important demand of the Zaręba prisoners was amnesty, or essentially the equivalent—the "review" of all sentences. The prisoners thought this was legally doable and would bring them freedom or substantially closer to it. But the feasibility of this demand was dubious. In any case, neither the prison system, the mine, nor Solidarity had the power to meet this demand. The problem was that the dream of freedom was the first on the list of demands. The very peculiar rules governing the psychology of a strike, especially a hunger strike conducted almost a thousand meters below ground, made the strikers obstinate. Continuing a hunger strike in such a place was simply dangerous.

After arriving at the mine, I immediately demanded to be taken down to meet the group of hunger strikers face to face. I think there were ninety-eight of them. I had to prepare them for compromise, to prevent a situation in which they would reject a deal that would feel like betrayal in their striking frenzy. The administration and the representatives of the prison system accepted my request (they also understood the danger) and even agreed for the Wrocław Solidarity radio journalists to accompany me with their recording equipment. Surprisingly, only the head of the mine's Solidarity cell, who was our guide, protested, and when we were underground, he grumbled that it was dangerous to go on the conveyor belt from level –550 to –830. Fortunately I managed to calm him.

When we reached level –830, the entire striking group surrounded us. I easily gained their trust, not so much because I wore a Solidarity pin but because until recently I had been a spokesman for the Countrywide Coordination Commission and occasionally was in the news. The prisoners may have seen me on TV or at least heard me on Polish Radio. Besides, I deliberately addressed them in prison slang and made sure to mention that I had been in Wołów. The prestige of my home prison was still high among recidivists, so they likely recognized me as one of their own. This was important, but not enough for my delicate mission. The dangerous powers of hope and desperation made the strikers prone to stick to their completely unrealistic demands for amnesty at any price. My task was to establish a dialogue, cool down their heightened emotions, and get them to discuss their chances among themselves. I argued that the fate of all prisoners in Poland, not just in Zaręba, depended on whether they could realistically weigh the odds. I said that the issue of amnesty could not be resolved at once and that their protest and sacrifice would not do it, even with the support of all the prisoners in Poland. The only chance was through negotiations between the countrywide Solidarity leadership and the authorities. Therefore they needed to trust us. The strikers could only count on an immediate deal about labor conditions resulting from the negotiations with the mine administration and representatives of the prison system. Salary demands would require further negotiations between Solidarity and the Central Administration of Prisons and the Ministry of Justice. We would initiate these negotiations, and we would expect a positive result. The problem of amnesty should be left to Solidarity, and if we were to have any success, this topic should be raised at a politically propitious moment. Thirty years later my language seems dry and stiff, but at the time I was driven by adrenaline, and my words flowed easily.

The strikers listened to me carefully, and some of what I said reached them, but the most important thing was the attitude of their three leaders. The youngest and most passionate resembled a type of fundamentalist leader well known to me from many strikes on the outside. He did not care whatsoever about assessing what could be accomplished, only the principles and justness of the demands. But the leadership team was led by a calm and very bright thirty-year-old man. He understood the situation well and had unbelievable authority among the prisoners. I have reasons not to mention his name—the first letter of his prison pseudonym, S., will do. Without his support I would not have been able to sign the formal agreement and bring the desperate hunger strikers out without harm to them or the mine.

There is no doubt S. had started the protest and devised their strategy. He selected the place that forced the authorities to open a dialogue and accept Solidarity as the mediator. In the 1970s the "grypsera" rules in Polish prisons became much stricter. This deeply divided the prisoners into two camps, approximately equal in number but hostile toward each other. In order to have a joint protest, this divide had to be bridged. S. achieved this and proudly pointed to his success.

"Among us," he told me, "it does not matter who uses 'grypsera' and who doesn't. We are united in the struggle for a common cause."

The strikers confirmed his words, and their approval made a great impression on me, unchanged even by the head of the mine's Solidarity cell whispering, "But they still sleep on opposite sides of the tracks" (the tracks for the cars with ore). During the rally at the –830 level, and then during the negotiations in the mine's office building, S. showed a great sense of pragmatism, quick-wittedness, and responsibility for his community. I thought he would make a good union activist.

We signed the agreement. The mine administration promised to provide the prisoners with a midday hot meal and pledged not to cancel the contract employing inmates from the Zaręba prison. The Zaręba prison representatives and the District Penitentiary Administration promised that there would be no retaliation for the hunger strike and that the strikers would not be transferred to other prisons. The demands regarding the prisoners' wages were to be passed on to the Central Penitentiary Administration with the endorsement of the Zaręba administration. The agreement also recorded my declaration that Solidarity would include in its negotiations with the government a request to prepare and pass a law for amnesty. It was agreed that representatives of the Lower Silesia Solidarity would be allowed to visit the Zaręba prison and contact the inmates. The strikers accepted the agreement and came above ground. I boarded a bus with them, and we went to Zaręba where the rest of the prisoners who were not working in the mine were holding a hunger strike in solidarity. S.

stood in front of the barred windows of the barracks, informed the inmates about the successful end of the protest, and declared the end of the strike. He was greeted by applause.

This looked like a happy ending, but the idyll did not last long. The mine, disregarding its own pledge, stopped employing prisoners. This was not too surprising after the big scare that the administration and workers had experienced during the hunger strike at the pumping station. We could not put pressure on the administration because we would have to do it through the mine's Solidarity Commission that was averse to employing prisoners. There was no retaliation for the strike. Indeed, I went to Zaręba twice and did not see anything unusual. But in November and at the beginning of December 1981, the most active participants of the protest were transferred to other prisons. S. ended up in Wołów. He wrote to me that he soon would be able to apply for parole. I intended to support his application with positive testimony submitted to the Wrocław Penitentiary Court, but martial law was declared, and I found myself behind bars.

On the day of the protest's happy ending (which could have ended up much worse!) I sat next to S. on the bus taking the prisoners back to Zaręba. We talked the entire way. Of course I asked him what he was in for. It turned out to be for fraud—and not the first time, as he was a recidivist. To commit fraud one must elicit trust—this is the most important skill for this criminal specialty. When employed for good in a case like the hunger strike, this skill is an essential quality in a leader. Used for ill, the same quality manifests itself as the ability to manipulate people targeted as victims. I thought that S.'s notable leadership talent must have been used previously for ill—yet this was the same man and the same talent, like two sides of the coin. I was sitting next to Dr. Jekyll, while Mr. Hyde was a theoretical construct for me. I was to meet him more than eight years later.

In 1989, as a result of a series of peculiar coincidences that I will relate later, I was a senator. Like the other parliamentarians, I received letters from my constituency. One day I received a letter addressed to me at the Senate by an unskilled hand—with no delivery address, no street name, no "registered" label, no sender's name, and no return address. Even before I opened the envelope I felt like I was holding a "kite." Indeed, this was a "kite" from S. The sentences he served in Zaręba, in Wołów, and then in another prison had ended or perhaps had been shortened with parole. In any case, he had managed to get out, got married, and had a child. And then he "slipped" again. He wrote to me that he was unjustly imprisoned and asked for my help. He wanted to be transferred to the prison for recidivists in R., where he thought he had a greater chance to earn a good conduct review and parole.

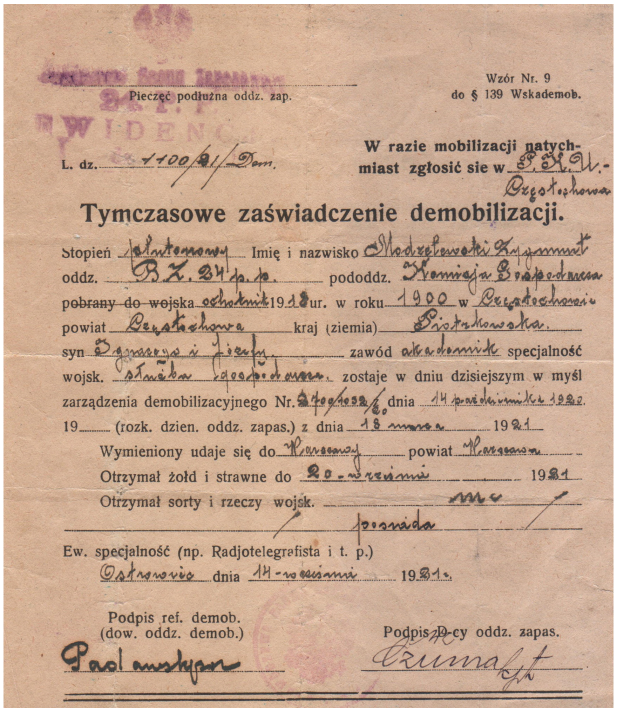
I was slightly insulted—an imprisoned recidivist should never write to another recidivist "protesting his innocence"—but of course I took care of the matter. First of all I requested the court that sentenced him send me his file. I only received the copy of the sentence with the justification, but this was enough to form an opinion. In the justification, the court detailed the facts determined during the proceedings. S. had committed his felony in a provincial capital in southeast Poland. He went there alone, leaving his wife. In this place he befriended a well-off family who hosted him. He earned his hosts' trust, so that when they went abroad for vacation, they left him to watch their house with all their expensive gadgets: TV equipment and other devices that at that time symbolized the social and material status of the owners. S. slowly sold all the equipment and hit the road with the cash. An arrest warrant was issued for him, and he finally got caught, arrested, and sentenced. He was not innocent, and the only thing I could do for him was tell the penitentiary court who was to decide his parole about the praiseworthy role he played in solving the dramatic conflict in the "Konrad" mine. I described and assessed that event on official letterhead with the seal of the Office of the Senate of the Republic of Poland. However, the court exercised its independence and weighed its own assessment as well as S.'s rich criminal past and rejected his plea for parole.

S. sent me a letter telling me about this. He did not hope to be released any time soon, but he asked me to meet him to help him in a personal matter. I managed to obtain his transfer to the prison in R. from the Central Penitentiary Administration, and I visited him there. It turned out that he was counting on my mediation to restore his relationship with his wife. He wanted to salvage his marriage, especially because he had a child and wanted to fulfill his role as a father in the future. He met his wife in prison during martial law; she found herself there as an interned or arrested Solidarity activist. I did not inquire how in 1982 a criminal recidivist near the end of his term was able to contact a female political prisoner. Perhaps he did cleaning next to the internment unit or the investigation unit for the arrested, or perhaps their windows were situated so that they could see each other or use the prison version of sign language. Prisoners were always inventive in finding ways to contact women. Even in the Third Unit at Mokotów, in spite of strict isolation, the walls resounded in the evenings with erotic dialogues in Morse code. In any case they met, and S. received the woman's home address in a large industrial town. She was released before he was, and he followed her to her home. At that point it was like Agnieszka Osiecka's song, "Whatever you gave him, he ate and drank, and then he took you for his wife."[22]

S. gave me the phone number of his wife's closest friend. His wife did not have a phone at home, and at that time not many people in Poland had cell phones. He asked me to reach his wife and convince her to resume contact with him. I was no longer that fond of the "Konrad" mine hero, but I made the call. I introduced myself, told the friend why I was calling, and got the response, "Good Lord, I hope they won't release him any time soon!" Despite this comment, we agreed that I would call back the next day at the same time, and the friend would get S.'s wife so that I could talk to her directly. I learned the ending of the romantic story from both women. I no longer remember who said what, but they both told the same story. On the basis of their chaotic and very emotional explanations it was possible to roughly reconstruct the events.

After S. was released he went straight to the woman. He completely charmed her. Blinded by love and still full of excitement from their wedding, she initially ignored the fact that she was the only one supporting them. He had been released from prison with several hundred zlotys from the so-called *żelazna kasa* (rainy day fund), and he obviously needed some time to adapt. But with passing time it became increasingly evident that he needed to find a job and contribute to the household, especially because they were expecting a child. S. was not eager to work, and his wife kept insisting on it. S. responded in the age-old prison way—he performed the so-called *zasypka*. The women had not heard of this "grypsera" term, but they described that he shaved the lead from an indelible pencil into a powder and sprinkled it in his eyes. This is a dangerous self-mutilation that requires immediate ophthalmological attention and prolonged hospital care, otherwise a patient can lose his sight. His wife stopped pressing her husband to work during his treatment, but when his eyesight and health were no longer in danger, she insisted that he get a job. But S. preferred to hit the road. He took off without warning with all their money and the only valuable things they owned—their wedding rings. He did not make much, but he treated his wife and child the same way as he treated the people who trusted him with their house and fancy equipment during their vacation abroad. I stopped trying to convince his wife to resume contact with her imprisoned husband.

NOTES



Pieczęć podłużna oddz. zap.

Wzór Nr. 9
do § 139 Wskademob.

L. dz. 1100/21/Dem.

W razie mobilizacji natychmiast zgłosić sie w P.K.U.-Częstochowa

Tymczasowe zaświadczenie demobilizacji.

Stopień plutonowy Imię i nazwisko Modzelewski Zygmunt
oddz. B.Z. 24 p.p. pododdz. Komisja Gospodarcza
~~pobrany do wojska~~ ochotnik 1918 ur. w roku 1900 w Częstochowie
powiat Częstochowa kraj (ziemia) Piotrkowska.
syn Ignacego i Józefy. zawód akademik specjalność wojsk. służba gospodarcza. zostaje w dniu dzisiejszym w myśl zarządzenia demobilizacyjnego Nr. 2700/1032/I/20 dnia 14 października 1920. 19...... (rozk. dzien. oddz. zapas.) z dnia 18 marca 1921

Wymieniony udaje się do Warszawy powiat Warszawa
Otrzymał żołd i strawne do 20-września 1921
Otrzymał sorty i rzeczy wojsk. nie posiada

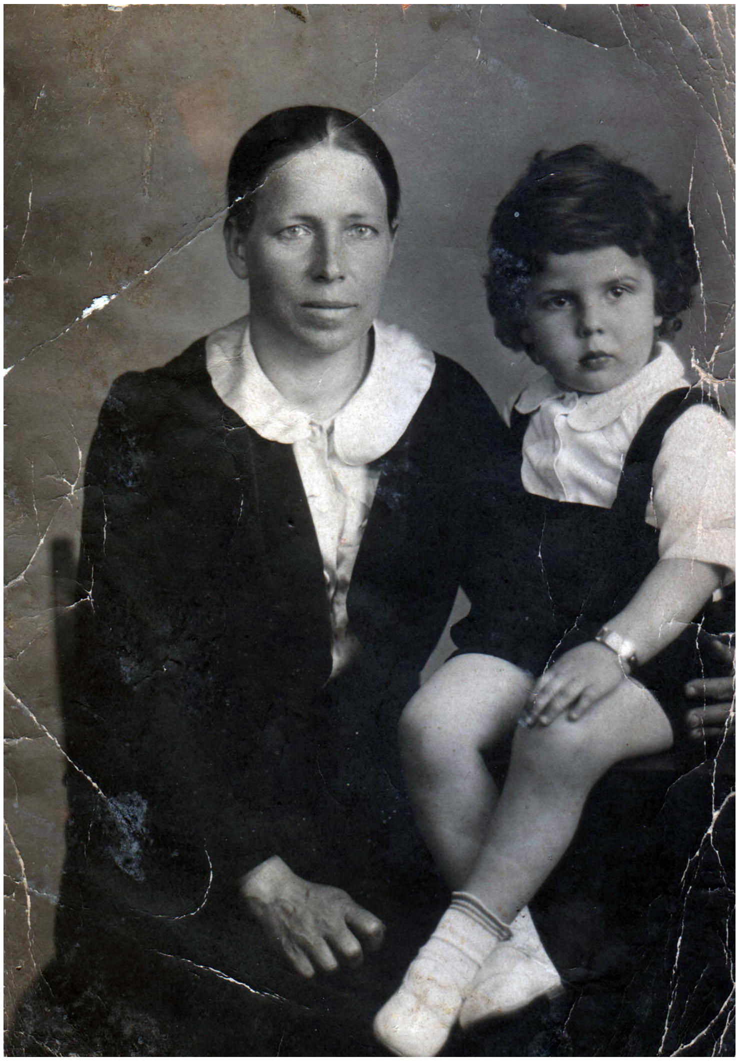
Ew. specjalność (np. Radjotelegrafista i t. p.)

Ostrowiec dnia 14-września 1921 r.

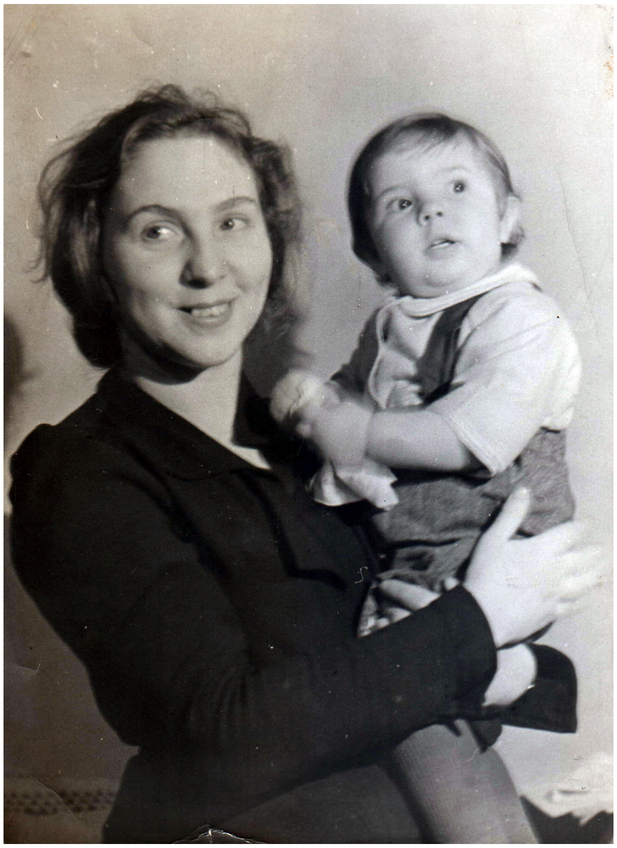
Podpis ref. demob.
(dow. oddz. demob.)

Podpis D-cy oddz. zapas.
Czuma

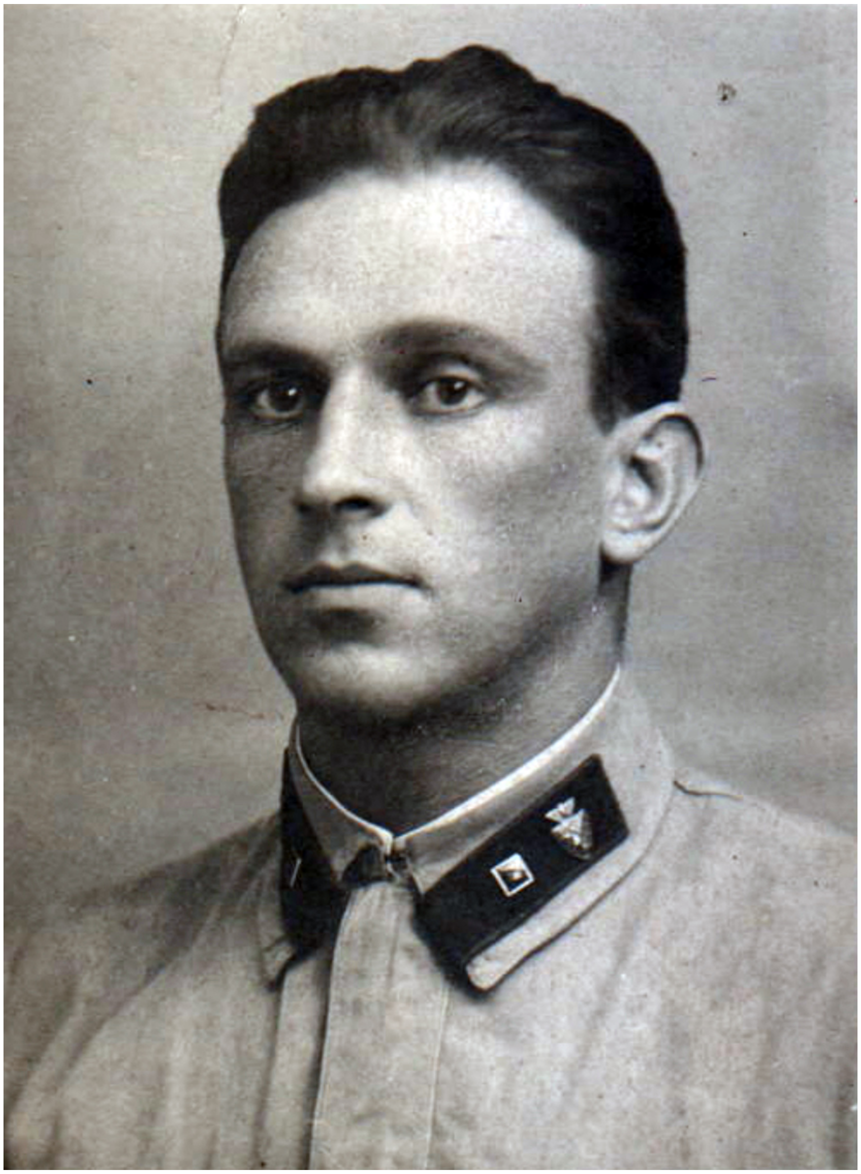
Zygmunt Modzelewski’s discharge papers after the Polish-Soviet war, 1921.



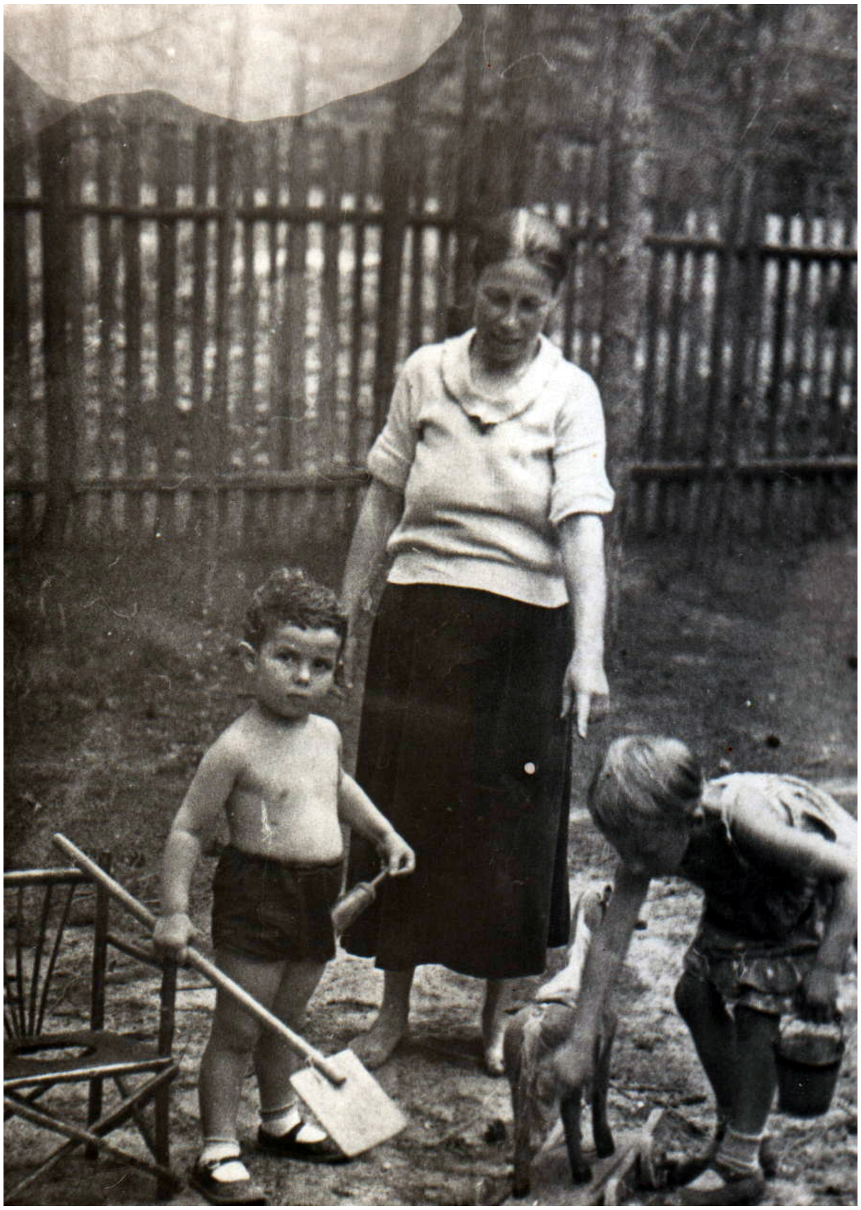
Katya Feduseyeva and KM.



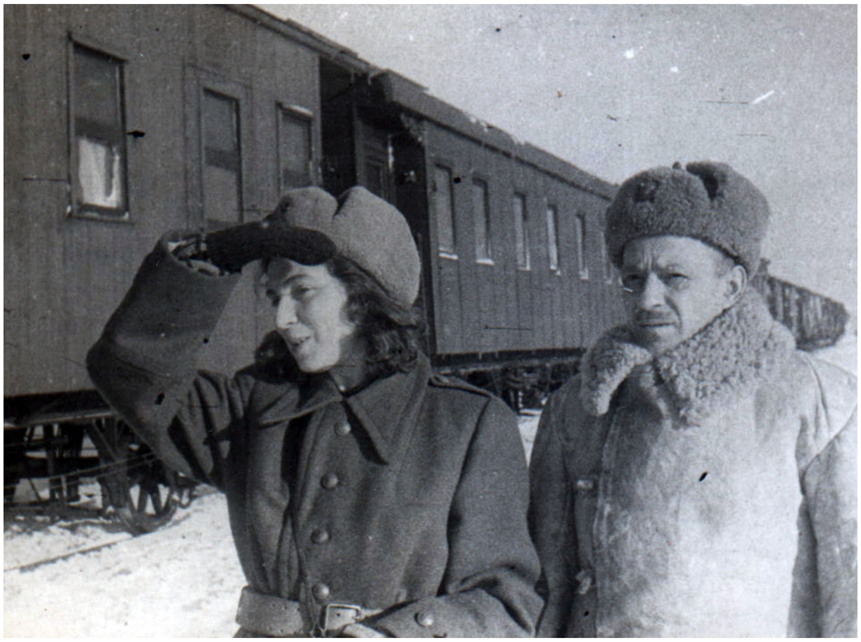
KM and his mother, Moscow, 1938/39.



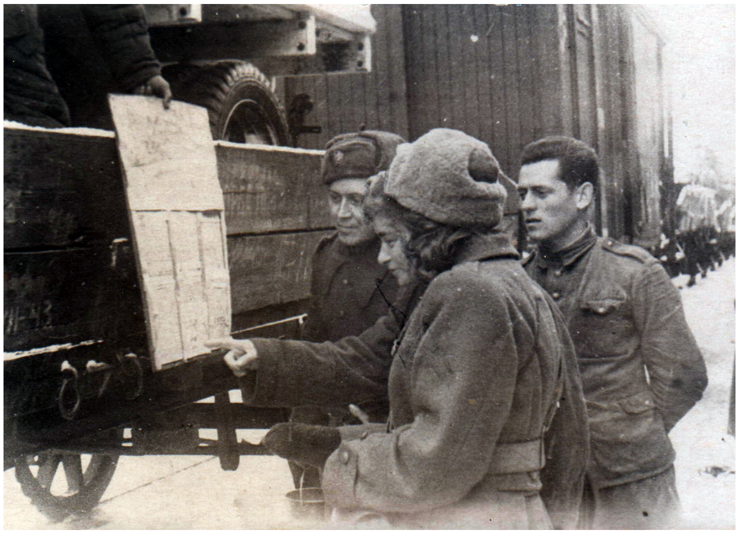
Alexandr Budnyevich, KM’s biological father.



KM, Katya Feduseyeva, and Lusha Negarville at the Woodland Spa.



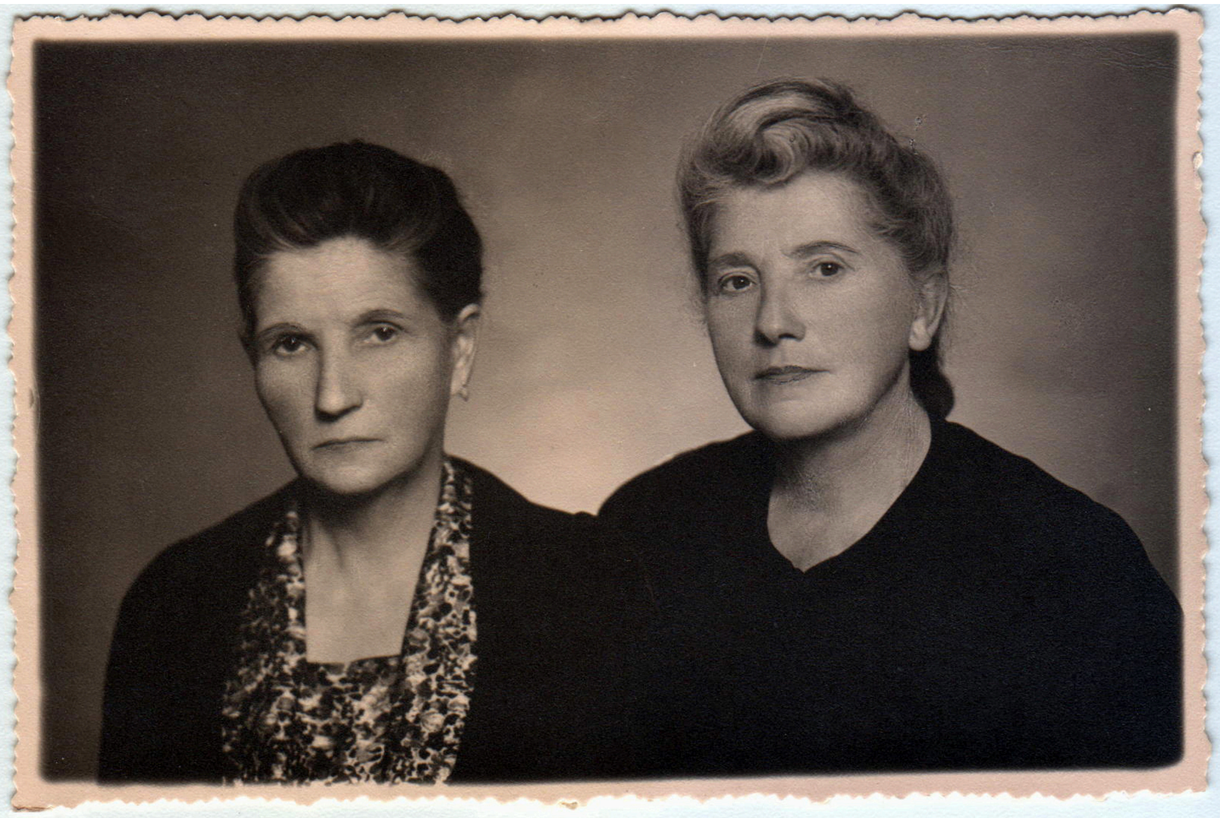
KM’s mother and Zygmunt Modzelewski, January 1944.



En route to the front; KM’s mother in the middle, January 1944.

Zygmunt Modzelewski, 1947.

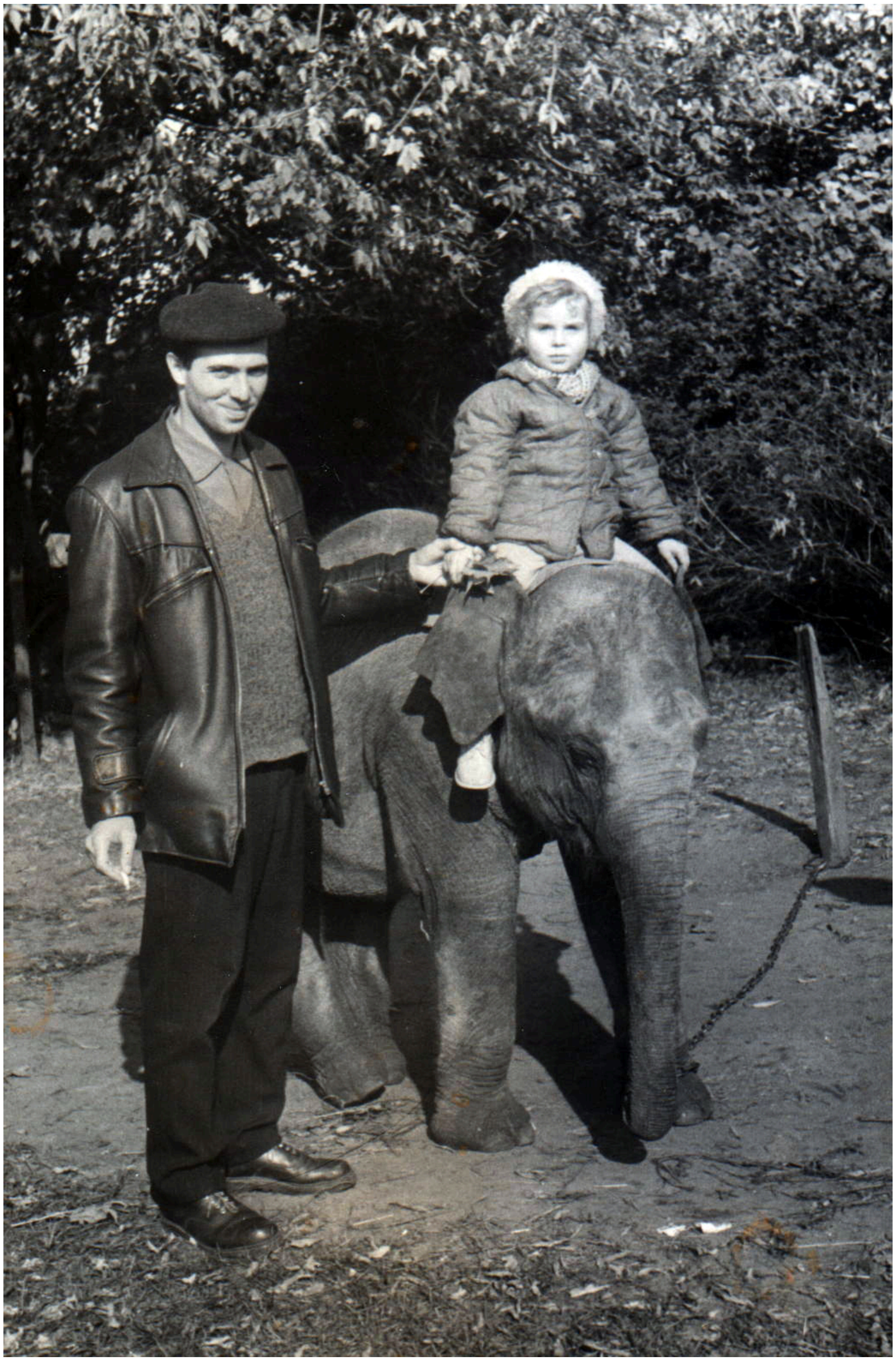
Zygmunt Modzelewski at the UN, New York, 1948.



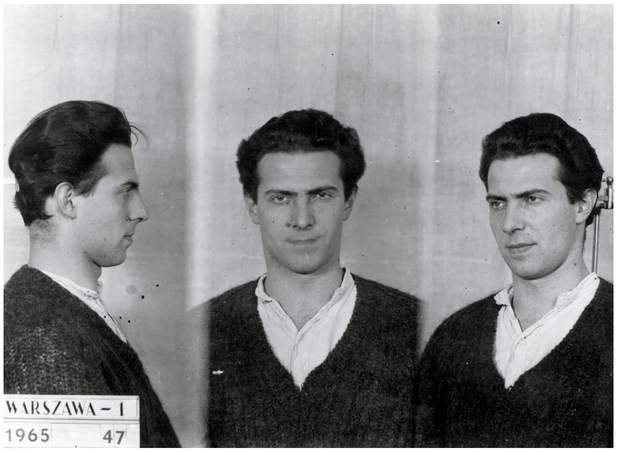
KM’s aunts, from the right, Stanisława Modzelewska and Apolonia Borowik.

KM after arriving in Warsaw, 1946.

KM learns about Poland, 1946.

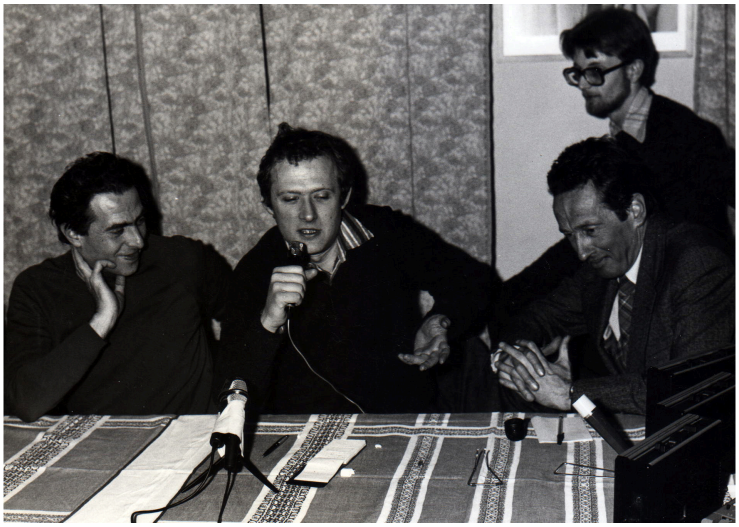


KM with daughter Ewa, 1963.

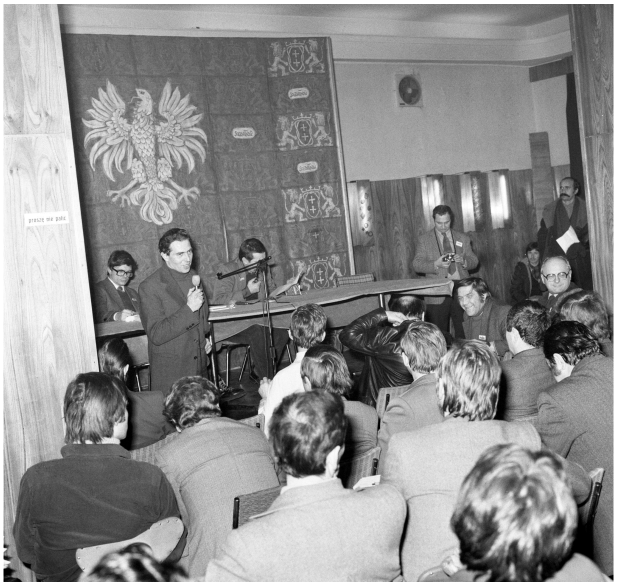


KM prison mugshot, 1965.

KM and daughter Ewa, and wife Bogna after release from prison. ***Source:*** **SB surveillance photo, collection of the Institute for National Remembrance IPN.**



Discussion at the Wrocław Club of Catholic Intelligentsia KIK. Left to right: KM, Adam Michnik, Krzysztof Kozłowski, and unidentified, 1980.



KM addressing a meeting of the Countrywide Coordination Commission KKP, Gdańsk, January 1981. *Source:* PAP-CAF.

Talks with Italian trade union activists before a “Solidarity” visit to Rome. Left to right: Andrzej Celiński, KM, unidentified, Andrzej Gwiazda, unidentified, Luigino Scricciolo, Emilio Gabaglio, and Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Gdańsk 1980/1981.

Rally in the Wrocław Predom-Polar factory, September 1981.

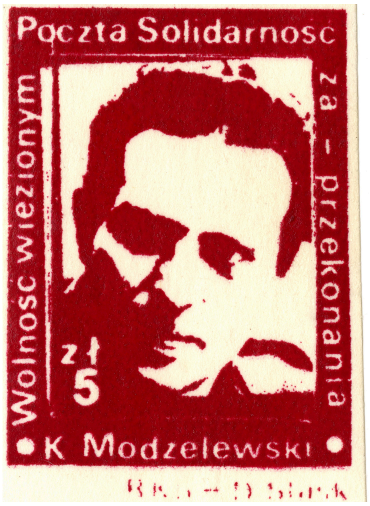
Rally in the Wrocław Predom-Polar factory, September 1981. Left to right: Marek Zimnak of the Predom-Polar “Solidarity” Factory Committee, KM wearing a “Solidarity” button, unidentified, and Predom-Polar CEO Karol Popiel.

WOJEWÓDZKI
DOM KULTURY

Rally with Lech Wałęsa in Wrocław, May 1981. Left to right: KM, unidentified, unidentified, Lech Wałęsa, unidentified, unidentified, Maciej Zięba, Władysław Frasyniuk, Mieczysław Wachowski, and Andrzej Celiński. *Source:* Photo Janusz Uklejewski/PAP-CAF.

KM interviewed by Janina Jankowska, summer 1981.

Internees in Białołęka. Left to right: KM, Henryk Wujec, Andrzej Gwiazda, and Adam Michnik. Photo Henryk M. Trębacz.


Poczta Solidarnosc
Wolnosc wiezionym
za - przekonania
zł
5
K Modzelewski
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“Underground Solidarity” postage stamp with KM and a demand to free political prisoners, 1980s. *Source:* From the Ośrodek KARTA archive.

Award ceremony for the White Eagle Medal, March 6, 1998. Left to right: KM, Jacek Kuroń, and President Aleksander Kwaśniewski. *Source:* Photo Kuba Atys/Agencja Gazeta.

Actress Maja Komorowska and KM as Queen and King at the celebration/commemoration of philosopher Leszek Kołakowski’s birthday, October 2017. *Source:* Photo Małgorzata Goetz.

KM and historian Andrzej Friszke, Warsaw, fall 2017. *Source:* Photo Katarzyna Raczkowska.

Clockwise: KM, Joanna Szczęsna, Miłosz Gałecki, Małgorzata Goetz, unidentified, and translator Gwido Zlatkes, Warsaw, fall 2017. ***Source*****: Photo Katarzyna Raczkowska.**

1. Trans. FLV.

2. The “Mazurka in Chains” (Polish: “Mazur kajdaniarski”) is a song written by Polish socialist Ludwik Waryński when he was imprisoned in Warsaw’s Citadel in 1885; it became an anthem for Polish socialists. Cf. Padraic Kenney, *Dance in Chains: Political Imprisonment in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 2.

3. The “Little Penal Code” (Polish: *Mały kodeks karny*, mkk) was temporary legislation introduced in 1946 and used by the authorities as an instrument of struggle against political opponents; it was an active law until January 1, 1970. Article 23 regarded production and distribution of illegal (that is, unauthorized) materials.

4. Józef Różański (1907–1981) was a NKVD officer and colonel in the Ministry of Public Security, the predecessor of the MSW. He gained notoriety as one of the most brutal secret police officers, personally torturing and killing dozens of prisoners.

5. Tadeusz de Virion (1926–2010) was a prominent lawyer and defense attorney in many political cases in communist Poland.

6. Oskar Lange (1904–1965) was an economist and diplomat; Michał Kalecki (1899–1970) was an economist; Bogusław Leśniodorski (1914–1985) was a political and legal historian; Stanislaw Frybes (1922–2013) was a literary historian.

7. Andrzej Gwiazda (b. 1935) was an engineer in the Gdańsk Shipyard. He was one of the founders of the WZZ-C, a member of the Inter-Factory Striking Committee, and vice president of Solidarity. Marian Jurczyk (1935–2014) was an employee of the Szczecin Shipyard and the head of the Szczecin Inter-Factory Striking Committee; he was the head of the Solidarity Pomorze Zachodnie Region. Grzegorz Palka (1950–1996) was a Solidarity activist in Łódź. Seweryn Jaworski (b. 1931) was the vice

president of the Mazowsze Solidarity. Jan Rulewski (b. 1944) was the head of the Bydgoszcz Solidarity. Andrzej Rozpłochowski (b. 1950) was a Solidarity activist in the Śląsko-Dąbrowski region.

8. The Alliance of the Center (Polish: Porozumienie Centrum, PC) was a Christian-Democratic party established in 1990 with Jarosław Kaczyński as its chairman. In 1997 the PC joined the Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS) and in 2001 the Kaczyński brothers formed a new party, Law and Justice (PiS).

9. Cardinal Józef Glemp (1929–2013) was the bishop and then archbishop of Warsaw and Gniezno. He was the Primate of Poland between 1981 and 2009.

10. General Czesław Kiszczak (1925–2015) was the Minister of Internal Affairs (1981–1990) and prime minister (1980). For an English translation of Michnik's letter, see Adam Michnik, "A Letter to General Kiszczak," in *Letters from Prison and Other Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 64–70.

11. Ryszard Gontarz (1930–2017) was a secret police officer and journalist, especially active during the anti-Semitic campaign in 1968. Maria Osiadacz was a journalist and author of communist thrillers. Kazimierz Kąkol (1920–2016) was a journalist and communist activist; between 1974 and 1980 he served in the government as the minister in charge of the Office for Religious Affairs.

12. Andrzej Mencwel (b. 1940) is a literary historian and cultural anthropologist.

13. From the poem "The Envoy of Mr. Cogito" by Zbigniew Herbert (1924–1998).

14. The Fourth International (est. 1938) is a revolutionary socialist international organization of the followers of Lev Trotsky, or Trotskyists. Its declared goals are to help the working class overthrow capitalism and to work toward international communism.

15. We did not talk about institutional affiliations in that conversation, as it was obvious there were none, and I did not suggest that such an affiliation be established.—K. M.

16. Quoted from Andrzej Friszke, *Anatomia Buntu* (Kraków: Znak, 2010), 252–53.

17. Article 5 of the mkk: “A Polish citizen who enters an agreement with a person acting on behalf of a foreign government or foreign organization in order to inflict harm to the Polish State is subject to the penalty of imprisonment for at least five years.”

18. Stefan Staszewski (1906–1989) was a communist apparatchik in the 1950s in charge of propaganda, education, and culture. He was expelled from the Party in 1968.

19. Erich Koch (1896–1986) was the Nazi Party Gauleiter in East Prussia from 1938 until 1945. Between 1941 and 1945 he was also the regional chief of civil administration for Białystok and the Reichskommissar for Ukraine.

20. “Przecwelony,” a past participle derived from the noun “cwel” (“cocksucker”).

21. Andrzej Czuma (b. 1938) is a politician, lawyer, and historian. He was one of the ROPCiO leaders.

22. Agnieszka Osiecka (1936–1997) was a poet and songwriter. She authored the lyrics to more than two thousand songs and is considered an icon of Polish culture.

Chapter 6

Socialism with Gierek's Face

Everyone from top to bottom
Robbed us blind,
Hid meat from us,
Leaving just sawdust . . .
But we Poles remember
That we come from the Piasts,
So we called on Gierek
To be our leader!
A folk ballad from Szczecin, December 1970[1]

RELIEF

The 1970 workers' rebellion overthrew Gomułka and brought Gierek to power, but it did not explode the systemic framework of the dictatorship. This revolt did not bring freedom to the Poles; it did not even promise freedom. But it brought a tangible relief. Only over time it became clear how important the events of 1970–1971 were for the later struggle for freedom.

The December events found me in Wołów. The loudspeaker that hung above my cell door aired news from Polish Radio One, along with the amateur prison radio broadcasts. From that source we first learned about the food price hikes. This news was followed by some meager information and a stream of inflammatory statements. Anyone familiar with the people's power and media would conclude that there were strikes, mass demonstrations, and bloodshed on the coast. After a few days, the radio broadcasted Prime Minister Cyrankiewicz's address in which he announced that the army and militia had received orders to shoot these destroyers of the public order. He dressed this announcement in rhetoric that brought to mind his June 1956 speech in Poznań where he threatened to chop off any hand raised against the people's power. The propaganda machine rolled on. The rebelling workers were labeled hoodlums, robbers, vandals, arsonists, and the "criminal element." These were provocative words. In the prison shop, the master craftsman approached me unexpectedly (prisoners were foremen, but masters and the administration were civilians "from the outside"). He stood silently for a while, and then, as if he could not hold back any longer, he said, "Who are they talking about, what hoodlums or criminal element? These are working people, just like me! Perhaps tomorrow they will shoot at me."

Never before or since did we exchange views, but in that situation masks were falling off from even the most reliable and trusted people in the regime. Give it some time and we would find a common language.

However, on Sunday December 20, 1970, the loudspeaker above the door spoke in human language, just like animals on Christmas Eve. First the Polish Radio news anchor announced in a voice charged with emotion and with an accent of triumph that the Seventh Plenary Session of the Party Central Committee had been held, and it had elected Edward Gierek as first secretary. Then Gierek's speech was to be aired. After this announcement the speaker fell silent; perhaps some idiot turned it off. A general banging on cell doors commenced, and a chorus of prisoners screamed "GIVE US GIEREK!" The speakers were turned back on, and we heard the words of the new leader: "Comrades, citizens, compatriots! Dramatic events have occurred in our country. The coastal cities: Gdańsk, Gdynia, Szczecin, and Elbląg have become places of workers' protests, disturbances, and street fights. People have been killed. We all feel this tragedy."

The contrast between these simple words and the rattle of the antiworker smear campaign was striking. Anyone who recalls that moment remembers that Gomułka's fall and particularly Gierek's first words instantly shifted the mood in society. In turn, this changed the course of events. Until December 20 tension was rapidly growing and threatening to escalate the conflict. During a meeting in Moscow on January 5, 1971, Gierek told Brezhnev, "If the decision on the replacement of leadership had not been made on Sunday [December 20], then the unrest would have spilled over to the entire country by Monday. The issue was the solidarity of the working class with the shipyard workers on the coast."

This could have been a purposefully exaggerated opinion. Gierek wanted economic aid from the Kremlin, and fear of returning social unrest in Poland could help obtain it. During the same conversation, Gierek told Brezhnev, "At this moment Poland is calm, but this is a calm sitting on a powder keg.”[2] Even if this alarmist tone reflected the interests of the Polish side, there is no doubt that the danger was serious and was treated seriously by the Kremlin, which had its own sources of information. Had the strikes and street protests spread beyond the coast to other industrial centers in Poland, the militia and army could have been insufficient to suppress the workers’ revolt. At that point the Soviet Army might have been needed to save the communist system in Poland. Two years after the intervention in Czechoslovakia that came with a very high political price, the Kremlin preferred to avoid another, possibly more dangerous adventure. Even when Gomułka, who blindly advocated for resolving conflict with force, was still first secretary, the Moscow leaders contacted other members of the Polish leadership separately. On December 18, Ambassador Averky Aristov handed Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz a letter from the Soviet Politburo to the Polish comrades. The next day the Polish Party Politburo decided to remove Gomułka and hand the helm to Gierek. The Seventh Plenary Session confirmed this change on December 20. There is no doubt this was with Moscow’s approval.

Even if the Polish authorities’ relationship with the Kremlin set limits on their policies, the PZPR leaders had their own emotions, views, and even principles. Ideological formulas gradually turned into an empty liturgy—a ritual of authority, necessary but performed without faith. Yet convictions that legitimized the governing elite’s “leadership role” in its own eyes became even more relevant. The motive of geopolitical realism was essential—“Poland only can exist on the map of Europe as a socialist country in an uneven alliance with the Soviet Union, and we guarantee this. Therefore we represent the Polish national interest.” Other than this, the Party elite’s sense of legitimacy was based on a special relationship between the Party and the working class. The events of June 1956 in Poznań and December 1970 on the coast, especially the use of the army to suppress the workers’ protests, severely undermined this sense of legitimacy based on the image of the Party as the embodiment of the workers. Probably not everybody treated this image entirely seriously, but for many Party activists, especially the older generation, this was important.

This image particularly applied to Edward Gierek, a “fourth-generation miner” who was born on the outskirts of Sosnowiec and for several years had worked in French and Belgian mines. Gomułka and his loyal supporters regarded the workers’ rebellion as a counter-revolution. This was seemingly just an ideological label, but for the communists this meant they did not face a social conflict that could be solved in many different ways but stood against a mortal enemy who must be completely destroyed. Encouraged by Moscow’s acquiescence, Gomułka’s Party competitors proposed a different interpretation rather than the stigma of a counter-revolution. During the KC Seventh Plenum on December 20, 1970, Gierek said, “The tragedy is that unfortunately the vast majority of those who took to the streets of Gdańsk, Gdynia, and Szczecin were workers. In this situation force was used. We must do everything in our might to end the conflict with the working class as soon as possible, and restore the shaken authority of our Party.” The traumatic memory of June 1956 and December 1970 became one of the most important determinants of the policy conducted by Gierek and his leadership team between 1970 and 1980. This group acted as if guided by the motto “Never again shall we shoot at workers.” Even in June 1976 when the Party Committee building in Radom was burning, and it seemed that the post-December policy had gone bankrupt, the officers and commanders of the ZOMO units sent to fight the workers were equipped with batons and tear gas but not firearms.

Another fundamental principle of Party politics during Gierek’s decade was complete loyalty toward Moscow, as well as the inviolability of the political system based on the “leadership role of the Party,” something that the Kremlin depended on to safeguard its domination. This meant that the new political direction, especially a different model of reaction to workers’ demands and strikes, could not push Poland into the path of democratic reforms like Czechoslovakia under Dubček. The recent invasion of Czechoslovakia by five states served as a reminder, although along with fear of Brezhnev’s wrath, the PZPR governing circles also were not inclined to give up their monopoly on power.

However, there was no harmony between the system’s principles and the directive to create “dialogue” and seek agreement with the protesting workers. On January 22, 1971, the local media in Szczecin aired a staged workers’ pledge to increase production. This seemingly unimportant event triggered a new strike in the shipyard, very quickly joined by other Szczecin companies. These were sit-in strikes, and their leaders, aware of the recent experience, excluded the possibility of taking to the streets. Nevertheless the situation could very easily return to the state at the beginning of December.

The Warski Shipyard Striking Committee compiled a twelve-point list of demands. Its first point requested the reversal of the food price hike announced in December. But the second demand already had an evidently political character, even if formally it did not question the institutions that were fundamental to communist Poland. The striking workers demanded new democratic elections for the shipyard's Factory Council of the Metalworkers' Trade Union and for the shipyard's Workers' Council. They also demanded new elections for the shipyard Party structures and the leadership of the youth organizations active in the shipyard, citing the expressed will of the Party majority and the ZMS members. Moreover, according to points 10 and 11, after the end of the strike, the Striking Committee was to become the Workers' Commission and monitor the implementation of the demands. Point 12 demanded that there would be no repression or harassment for the strike participants and proposed a general rule that would lead to de facto recognition of the legality of strikes: "A strike is not a felony because it is not prohibited." Point 5 stated, "We demand that First Secretary Comrade Edward Gierek and Prime Minister Piotr Jaroszewicz come to the Warski Shipyard to start a direct and honest dialogue with the workers' representatives i.e. the Striking Committee."

At the January 23 meeting of the Party Secretariat, Gierek pushed through the acceptance of the fifth demand. He went to the shipyard accompanied by Jaroszewicz, Jaruzelski, and Szlachcic.[3] After many hours of negotiation between the Party leader and the prime minister on one side and the representatives of the strikers on the other—unheard of in the communist camp—an agreement was reached in the early hours of January 25. Gierek convinced the strikers to end the strike even without meeting their demand to lower prices, but he essentially accepted the political demands. He agreed to pay for work time during the strike, as long as they would make up the lost production, and he promised that no one would be punished for striking (this was confirmed by Szlachcic for the MSW). Gierek seemingly went even further than the strikers' demands. He not only agreed that the Striking Committee should form the Workers' Commission as a body overseeing new elections for the Factory Council, Workers' Council, and Party Factory Commission, but also declared that the representatives of the Striking Committee be permanently included in the shipyard's Conference of Workers' Self-Governance.

Perhaps the idea of including nonconformist workers in the official union and workers' self-governing bodies was a seed of a broader plan to install some mechanism to solve workers' complaints within the political system of communist Poland. In any case, on January 26, the day after the Szczecin negotiations, Gierek met with Tricity factories' representatives in Gdańsk.[4] Activists from the December 1970 striking committees also were invited (including Lech Wałęsa, then unknown to the broader public) along with the activists from official organizations. But soon the usual combination of "the leadership role of the Party" and the police monitoring "unreliable elements" prevailed, and the true leaders were sidelined and eventually eliminated from the official union and self-governance structures, as well as from the factories where they were revered. Still, the January 1971 Szczecin strike and the direct negotiations between the top Party and state leaders and representatives of the shipyard as well as the agreement itself had lasting psychological and social consequences. This precedent was never forgotten, and it formed the pattern for August 1980.

The Łódź textile workers' strike was the third big conflict that winter. On February 10 the largely female workers in the textile factories (as well as in other factories) ceased work and demanded increased salaries and improvements in working conditions. Some also demanded the repeal of the December price hike. Unlike in December and January on the coast, the Łódź workers did not form striking committees, elect representatives to negotiate with the authorities, or create an interfactory body. Their demands were exclusively economic, and the lack of representatives to negotiate paradoxically made compromise more difficult. On February 13, when the entire city of Łódź was virtually on strike, the Politburo met. It excluded the use of force outright and decided "to act exclusively through political and economic means.” The Politburo did not want to repeal the price hike. It planned to allocate 200 to 220 million zlotys to boost salaries in the textile industry and to create a half-billion-zloty reserve “to adjust salaries in justifiable cases” (read as “quashing” subsequent strikes). However, the government had to declare that “in the present economic situation further salary increases are not possible.” On February 14 Prime Minister Jaroszewicz, accompanied by Jan Szydlak and Józef Tejchma, was sent to Łódź to meet the Party activists in the textile factories.[5] But the official “activists” were unable to persuade the workers to return to work, just as they were unable to prevent the strike. The rally-like meetings between Jaroszewicz and Szydlak and the striking workers were heated and emotional and did not result in an agreement. To defuse the dangerous conflict, the authorities had to offer fundamental and spectacular economic concessions. Repealing the December price hike seemed less risky and expensive than increasing salaries for these textile workers, as this would cause an avalanche of pay demands in other industries and industrial centers. On February 15 the government announced that the December food price hike was canceled effective March 1. After the decision, the textile workers resumed work. The situation in the country calmed down significantly, although in March strikes broke in Bełchatów and Ozorków, among other places.[6]

The political and economic strategy of Gierek’s decade was based on two principles. On one hand, it adopted a rule not to suppress strikes by force but rather to attempt dialogue with workers and give in to their economic demands. On the other hand, there was loyalty toward Moscow and the immutability of the systemic base of the dictatorship. If Poles could not be granted democratic freedoms, while at the same time the most brutal forms of violence were off the table, then their material aspirations had to be met. Thus the new policy combined increased investments in the economy with increased consumption funded by credit easily obtainable in financial markets fueled by petrodollars during the 1970s. Modern technologies imported from the West were supposed to enable the Polish economy to achieve success in exporting goods, which in turn would pay off the credit. Today it is easy to make fun of this plan, but at that time the economic progress of the “Asian tiger” was based on the same scheme.[7]

Only later did we learn the hard way that the socialist economy could never become a tiger because of poor quality of production, weak innovation, and low efficiency.

On February 6–7, 1971, the KC Eighth Plenum set the limits to which the Party was willing to accept a critical revision of its pre-December policy. An official revision of the PZPR's position in March 1968 was beyond the pale. In addition to the anxiety of the younger apparatchiks who had been promoted, Moczar's strong standing played an important role. Even if he did not succeed in replacing Gomułka, he remained the KC secretary responsible for the MSW and even advanced from deputy to full member of the Politburo. In 1970, at my suggestion, my lawyers tried to get Kuroń and my sentences shortened because even if the 1969 amnesty did not include us as recidivists, it should have nullified the final part of our previous sentence. We would have gained almost a year. The end of our term would be November 1971 and not, as for me, October 1972. This complicated calculation turned out to be no good because neither before nor after December 1970 did the authorities take the opportunity to shorten any part of our sentences.

We did not want to submit a petition for clemency, so we had to wait for the date when we could be paroled in the standard manner.[8] For Jacek, who had received a half-year's shorter sentence, this date was in June 1971, three months earlier than my date. But his lawyer's motion was rejected on July 9. I notified my family and lawyers that I would not request parole unless the decision about Jacek's was reversed.

In the meantime, the academic community brought up the issue of the post-March 1968 repression with the Party leadership. This included a request for Kuroń's release as well as for Maciej Kozłowski, the main dissident sentenced in the so-called taternicy case.[9] Professor Edward Lipiński (whom Gierek treated with ostentatious attention in front of the TV cameras) handed Gierek a list of political prisoners whose further imprisonment was detrimental to the relationship between the new authorities and the intelligentsia.[10] In June 1971, during a meeting between Józef Tejchma and Warsaw writers, my mother asked Tejchma how the Party leadership intended to solve the issue of Kuroń and

Modzelewski. Tejchma responded formally, “You will receive an answer at the appropriate time,” but soon afterward his office got in touch with her. I found two letters to Tejchma in my mother’s papers—one dated July 8, and the other from July 27. Both letters concerned Jacek and me. In the second one, apparently written with a lawyer, my mother criticized the decision of the penitentiary court in refusing Kuroń parole. She concluded with, “To prevent any misunderstanding, I would like to emphasize that I wrote my letter of July 8 to the Secretary [that is, to Tejchma who was then a Politburo member and KC Secretary] not just because Karol Modzelewski is my son. I wrote it about both sentenced people, Modzelewski and Kuroń. In my opinion, as a human being and a citizen, their case is joint and indivisible, and it is impossible to treat it otherwise.”

My mother took a similar stand in her communication with Stanisław Kania’s office, who took over the case according to the division of tasks in the Party leadership.[11] Responding to the argument that in each case parole is treated individually, my mother stated that if Jacek did not receive parole, I intended to invalidate my lawyer’s motion, which would be equal to taking the case off the docket. This was entirely reasonable because today it is known that the MSW and the KC Administration Department had seriously considered the possibility of releasing me but keeping Jacek. However, it seems that our fate again was determined by power play at the top of the Party.

In June 1971 Mieczysław Moczar, suspected of organizing a plot to overthrow Gierek, was removed from the Party Secretariat and lost his control over the MSW and the public prosecutor’s office. Moczar’s fall resulted in the arrest and trial of Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Ryszard Matejewski and a group of ranking officers of the Intelligence (the so-called Zalew case) and a series of personnel changes.[12] This naturally had an impact on other political decisions. In Jacek’s case there was a formal obstacle because after a negative parole decision a prisoner could reapply after six months. But a court was able do it ex officio without paying attention to the time frame.

On September 13, 1971, two months and four days after the denial, Jacek was again summoned before the parole court. He described it to me in such a charming way that it deserves to be repeated here. “Listen, Kuroń,” the judge explained, “We are taking up your case again because it is possible that we decided it too hastily. You see, there have been some important changes in the country. The most important thing is to be for socialism. And Kuroń, you are for socialism, right?” Jacek opened his mouth, but the judge was afraid he would start arguing and did not let him talk. He waved his hands and answered his own question: “We know you are for socialism. Therefore, Kuroń, you are being paroled. But you will be on probation for a year, and during that time you have to stay away from illegal activities.” He not only said this but also wrote it—word for word—in Jacek’s official parole document. Jacek was able to hang it on his wall, and when the year was up, citing the court document, he could say that he was allowed to do illegal things again.

Three days after Jacek’s hearing, I stood before the penitentiary judge in Wołów along with a prosecutor and a representative from the prison administration. That meeting was less entertaining than Jacek’s but similar overall. The judge asked if I could assure him that I would not return to a path of conflict with the state. I answered that this depended on the durability of the post-December policy. If it would not be reversed, I would not return to a path that would send me back to prison. I was trying to answer both honestly and diplomatically, but it came out as usual. However, the judge did not make a fuss. The prison representative gave me a positive evaluation, but because of the nature of my crime he was against parole. The prosecutor was more with the times—he said he did not contest my lawyer’s motion. The court decided to release me, set my probation until October 1972, and prohibited me from “any and all activities that could have negative outcomes to the social, political, and economic interests of the People’s Republic of Poland” during this period. To our satisfaction, this time Jacek and I left prison almost at the same time, on September 17 and 18, 1971.

On the second day after our return we went to see Adam Michnik to talk about Poland after December. Adam turned on a tape recorder, and we listened with bated breath to the long discussion held on the night of January 24–25 between Gierek and the delegates of striking workers in Szczecin. It was as if word had become flesh. The working class materialized as a political subject, forced the highest authorities to dialogue, and was able to speak with its own voice. Krzysztof Kieślowski obtained the tape, and Michnik’s schoolmate (and colleague from the Club of Contradiction Seekers) Andrzej Titkow brought it from Szczecin.[13] Adam passed it to Bolesław Sulik who took it to the West and transcribed it for Instytut Literacki.[14] It appeared as a book that contributed to the change of perception of industrial workers in large factories, as well as the attitudes of the intelligentsia during the times of KOR and legal Solidarity.[15] When Adam talked about the participants in the workers’ revolt on the coast, his words resounded with fresh emotion: “They were the first to shed blood.” He had no doubt that this blood was shed in the struggle for our common freedom.

As for Adam himself, when in September 1967 he was released from prison on amnesty, the authorities sent him to work in the Warsaw Róża Luksemburg Electric Lamp Factory. This was to contribute to his reeducation. In 1976, and especially in 1980, this experience turned out to be very useful for him.

But at that time it was hardly possible to take advantage of experiences. There was a prevailing mood of relaxation and relief. The intelligentsia as well as the students were scattered and devastated after March 1968 and were not capable of supporting the protesting workers. From the perspective of those involved in culture, education, and scholarship, 1968–1970 was the blackest period since Stalinist times. The post-December liberalization and opening to the West were greeted by praise and with hope that they would last. The leaders of the workers’ strikes who for a brief time were allowed to function in public needed support from the intelligentsia. But for understandable reasons they did not seek it among the opposition, which was crushed in March 1968. Public intellectuals not only remembered and felt March and August 1968 in their bones, but after the dramatic fall of the Prague Spring they no longer hoped for radical democratization. The prevailing conviction was that the liberalization offered by Gierek must be accepted, that is, the only thing to do was to try to make it last and try to broaden it.

I shared this view. I was a revolutionary with baggage. I thought the Brezhnev Doctrine was a wall against our aspirations. After Poland took part in the invasion of Czechoslovakia on the side of the Soviet Army, I no longer believed that a revolutionary flame, no matter where it started, would spread easily across the whole empire and reach Moscow. I also was a historian, and I knew that if I did not return to my scholarly work, I would definitely be out of my profession. I made my choice, but it was not a momentary decision. Despite many hesitations and challenges after June 1976, I stuck to it until August 1980. Sometimes I felt discomfort, but I do not regret it. I carried out most of my research on Poland's political system and society during the Piast dynasty in 1971–1980. Without it I would not be who I am.

Besides, initially the situation made my choice easier. During the first years of Gierek's decade, the 1960s opposition was not only decimated by political emigration but was also politically clueless. It existed more as personal connections than common activities. The new rulers decided to liberate themselves from the negative memory of the March repression through discreet halfway gestures. Apparently they considered readmitting the expelled students to Warsaw University, but they feared the reaction of the "Party activists" who had been elevated after March 1968. Therefore at the beginning of 1972 they implemented a more modest solution. A special commission was formed, formally at the Warsaw Party Committee's Department of Scholarship, but in fact supervised by KC Secretary Franciszek Szlachcic who was responsible for scholarship and education. The department instructor Halina Krysanka participated in that commission on Szlachcic's behalf. She was intelligent, tactful, and decisive. From the end of February or the beginning of March 1972, the commission started summoning the "Paratroopers" who had been expelled four years earlier. One doctoral student expelled in 1964 was invited as well—myself. Kuroń had found nominal employment as a personal secretary for the writer Igor Newerly, and the commission did not call him.[16]

The commission did not ask about our political views or plans, and we were not expected to make any declarations. They just said, "You are not studying now (in my case, you are not working), but unfortunately we cannot readmit you to Warsaw University because the rector would object. But we can offer you extension studies outside of Warsaw." Within this framework specific proposals were made, and one could discuss them or even bargain. They proposed to Jan Lityński that he continue his math studies in Poznań, however he managed to go to Wrocław University.

Adam Michnik was sent to study history in Poznań, and Teresa Bogucka to the sociology program in Łódź. I came to my interview with a list of my publications and Aleksander Gieysztor's written recommendation. As a result I managed to bargain for a position of senior assistant in the Wrocław branch of the Institute of Material Culture, Polish Academy of Science. On June 1, 1972, I officially returned to work as a researcher in my specialty (of course without teaching or contact with students), and my twenty years in Wrocław began.

I resumed my research on the Middle Ages a week or two after my release, without waiting for employment. Over the next few months, I wrote two articles and submitted them for publication. I no longer had a censorship ban on my name, and one of these articles was published in *Kwartalnik Historyczny* no. 3/1972. It had the esoteric title "Narok—beneficjum grodu" ("The *Narok*: A Beneficium of the Town"). The same issue included articles by Bronisław Geremek, who had relinquished his Party card the day after the Warsaw Pact's armies entered Czechoslovakia; by Jerzy Jedlicki, who did the same thing in March 1968; and a review by Marcin Kula of a book published in the West by the March émigré Ignacy Sachs. This was too much. Szlachcic called the *Kwartalnik*'s editor-in-chief, Professor Bogusław Leśniodorski (who was a member of the Party, thus could be "disciplined"), on the carpet.

Szlachcic started off cordially, "My dear Professor, the table of contents is a political demonstration!"

"Comrade Secretary," Leśniodorski protested, "the censors had no objections. Take a look at Modzelewski's text. Is there anything objectionable in what he writes about the *narok*?"

"Not at all," Szlachcic responded. "If he writes a book on the *narok* we will publish it immediately. As a specialist on medieval settlements Modzelewski is welcome as long as he does nothing else. But you have four issues a year, why publish all these people in a single issue?"

I was employed in Wrocław, but I was not required to live there. I just needed to attend monthly department meetings. I held my weekly office hours in the Warsaw office of the Institute of History, and I worked at home and in libraries. After my release I stayed with my mother, as the many years of separation had put a strain on my marriage. After a few months, my wife and I filed for divorce, technically on her request but by mutual consent. We were granted a divorce relatively soon. Only years later did I realize what a trauma this was for our daughter, even if initially I did not live far from her because my mother's apartment was one flight down from hers.

In the summer of 1973 I visited the archeological excavations at Sobótka near Wrocław. There I met Aleksandra Janik, a midwife at the local health center who had taken a two-week vacation to work with the archeologists not far from where she lived. Archeology was her hobby. She was much more knowledgeable than I about medieval and ancient pottery. She drew cross-sections of the excavation pits and cooked dinners for the whole group. Like me, she was divorced and lived with her thirteen-year-old son in a one-room apartment on the Sobótka market square. She knew every woman in that town of twenty thousand. She was their confidante, a born social activist, and it can be said without exaggeration that nearly all the small children in town had passed through her hands. She also knew women from the surrounding villages. In August 1974 we married and settled in Sobótka.

In Sobótka I learned about a different Poland than the one seen from the urban perspective of Warsaw, Wrocław, or Kraków. Everybody knew everything about everybody, but they hardly could be called "locals." All people over twenty-seven years old were born somewhere else, usually near Lwów, Stanisławów, or Tarnopol. A borderland mentality transferred to an ex-German territory added a particular flavor to these Lower Silesian towns and the Wrocław metropolis, a kind of a common denominator. But the numerators varied significantly. After the war large families—whole clans—of repatriates ended up in Sobótka, and the relationships between these clans gave a familiar color to the official structures of provincial life. People in Sobótka watched the movie *Sami swoi* in the town theater (there was a town theater when I lived there) not as a comedy but as a saga about their own past.[17] On the other hand, Wrocław was a large, open city where repatriates mixed with newcomers from Central Poland who felt constrained or threatened in traditional communities and tried to disappear from the radar of their own environment or the secret police and start anew in the Recovered Territories.[18] In combination with the illustrious tradition of Lwów cultural and academic life, this influx gave

Wrocław a Galician hue.[19] It created a dynamic and diverse community welcoming to all newcomers. Everybody was a friend because everybody was from elsewhere.

I lived in Sobótka from 1974 to 1976 and then again after my release from prison in August 1984 until February 1986. I lived in Wrocław between 1976 and 1981 and between 1986 and 1994. I was born in Moscow, grew up in Warsaw, but when I am asked where I am from, I say, "From Wrocław." Warsaw University was and still is my alma mater, but Wrocław is my town, even if I have not lived there for a long time. This is a matter of feeling, or local patriotism. Still, I do not reject Sobótka. Last year the Sobótka town council bestowed on me the title of honorary citizen, and it warmed my heart. Recently, because of friendships with my neighbors, I also feel at home in my Warsaw Bielany neighborhood.

Moving to Sobótka meant that contact with my Warsaw circle of friends weakened. A difference in our attitudes had popped up even earlier. The veterans of March 1968 maintained close social ties, held spirited discussions, and reached out to the people associated with the Club of Catholic Intelligentsia (KIK).[20] They also made connections with prominent writers and scholars. I was sympathetic to this and even sometimes attended their gatherings, but I attributed no political significance to these activities. In my opinion, at the beginning of the 1970s, only the prison sentences of the "Ruch" group merited public protest.[21] Furthermore, only well-known authorities such as Professor Edward Lipiński, Antoni Słonimski, or Maria Ossowska should have (as indeed they did) carried out these protests—not notorious rebels recently released from prison.

In the autumn of 1975, when the authorities announced changes in the Constitution of the People's Republic of Poland along with a citizens' debate, I had been living in Sobótka for over a year.[22] It was difficult to get there and awkward to reach me over the phone. One had to call the post office and ask to be connected to the midwife. But in October I went to Warsaw to hear my mother lecture on the interpretation of Chekhov's plays. Jacek Kuroń and Adam Michnik also came to the lecture, and afterward they took me aside and told me they were going to participate in the Constitution debate and present their own position in the form of a letter signed by a group of people. I responded rather rudely that I was not interested. I did not see their text, and it probably did not exist yet. A few weeks later it became known publicly as the “Letter of 59,” and I found out that it contained a very interesting point.[23] I quote the relevant fragment on the freedom of labor: “This freedom does not exist if the state is the sole employer, and trade unions are subjected to party structures that in fact rule the state. In such conditions—as the experiences of 1956 and 1970 demonstrate—attempts at the defense of workers’ interests may result in bloodshed and can lead to serious disturbances. Therefore it is necessary to provide employees with the possibility to elect their own professional representation independent from state or party structures. It is also necessary to secure the right to strike.”

Two years earlier Jacek Kuroń and Adam Michnik asked me why I was reluctant about dissident activities, which then were still on a very modest scale. I answered that opposition activities can be undertaken only by someone who is ready and willing to accept the possibility of ending up in prison. Jacek and Adam knew how to count prison time, and perhaps they thought that I had decided that six years was enough, and they needed to respect this. Perhaps after my rude response to their letter about the Constitution, they gave up and did not pursue it. I learned about the creation of the Committee for the Defense of Workers (KOR) from Radio Free Europe in September 1976. KOR was established without my knowledge and was doing fine without me, even if it emerged from issues that I completely identified with. I had a sense of discomfort in not joining KOR, but it was a consequence of the choice I had made a few years earlier. The choice between values is always painful, and sometimes it hurts years later, like posttraumatic stress. But I do not regret it. In the 1980s I managed to do my part and serve time in prison. I also managed, before and after, to find fulfillment as a medieval historian.

THE CRISIS AND THE NEW OPPOSITION

In true socialism the prices for goods—except for seasonal goods and those sold at market such as radishes, scallions, or fresh eggs—were fixed prices set centrally. The fluctuations of supply and demand did not translate into price changes for these goods. The immediate results of shortages were empty shelves. The state of chronic market imbalance, also known as a shortage economy, had many different negative consequences that accumulated over time and assumed dangerous dimensions. Every few years the authorities tried to remedy this by ordering wholesale and usually drastic price hikes. An increase of the official prices for meat by a dozen or more percent was very painful for the citizens.

During Gomułka's fourteen years in power, such price hikes took place in 1959 and then in 1967. First, one kilo of the "regular" brand of sausage (an emblematic and politically sensitive item) increased from 18 to 26 zlotys and then from 26 to 36 zlotys. The third price hike for "regular" sausage was an increase to 42 zlotys announced just before Christmas 1970 and resulted in a workers' revolt that toppled Gomułka. Gierek's government initially tried to retain the increased prices, but after the strike in Łódź, it rescinded the December hike. They decided this was politically safer and economically less expensive than giving in to inevitable waves of pay demands. This finally stalled the barely working mechanism that every few years adjusted prices to the demands of the market. Initially the ensuing gap was filled by imported food purchased by the state on credit from the West, which together with the simultaneous import of investment goods and the lack of expected income from export resulted in another dangerous imbalance exacerbated by excessive foreign debt. Since 1974 the need for a new broad price increase for food was growing more and more acute, but the authorities delayed the decision out of fear. In the end, with their hearts in their mouths, they decided to go ahead.

On the evening of June 24, 1976, Prime Minister Jaroszewicz announced new price hikes and declared that "consultations" with society would take place the following day, and the Sejm would make a final decision on June 26. The time frame for the discussion with the people was ridiculously short, but this was irrelevant. The authorities had no partner for their discussions. The only possible form of consultation was essentially protests on the street. For this, one day was enough. In addition to Radom, Ursus, and Płock where the workers took to the streets, there were strikes in Gdańsk, Szczecin, Elbląg, Łódź, Warsaw, and other cities. In Wrocław, where I lived, the crews of three large factories stopped working: the Hydral air industry factory, the Aspa welding equipment factory, and the

Pilmet agriculture equipment factory—all on the first day after the announcement of the increase. It seemed like the next day strikes would roil the entire country.

The reaction of Gierek's authorities was initially determined by the experience of December 1970. The militia detachments sent to combat the protesters in Radom, Ursus, and Płock had no firearms, consistent with the decision not to shoot at workers. The MSW leadership protested—they felt as if they had been disarmed, but Kania, who oversaw the so-called enforcement branches in the Politburo, was firm. Then within twenty-four hours the authorities withdrew the price hikes, ridiculously justifying their retreat by the need to analyze the great number of suggestions that had been submitted during the "consultations." This prevented these first strikes and demonstrations from turning into a countrywide rebellion. At the same time, it was something more than a defeat for the authorities. In light of the Radom Provincial Party Committee building being set on fire, it was clear that the post-December formula of an unspoken compromise between the new authorities and society had reached its end. Poland could no longer grow stronger on borrowed money, and the people no longer had the opportunity to become wealthier.[24] The model of "goulash socialism" did not work in Poland, and it could not secure tranquility. What was worse, the reasonable decision to withdraw the ill-fated price hikes was followed by an irrational revenge by the authorities.

Retaliation carried out by militiamen already had started during the protests. After the ZOMO "went to fight without weapons" and only had batons with which to combat the crowd, they had to compensate for their fear by treating the detained people cruelly.[25] With a lump in my throat (and I had seen a lot) I read the first KOR communiqués with dry descriptions of police stations beatings, people handcuffed to radiators or made to run between rows of militiamen with clubs (the so-called fitness trail), and especially accounts of the arrested shaved with dull pocket knives.[26] I realize that the historical predecessor to the "fitness trail" was the inhuman punishment for disobedient nineteenth-century Tsarist soldiers—execution by ramrod. But this ironic name originated in communist Poland, and the procedure seems to me to be related to the usual treatment of arrested hoodlums or imprisoned criminals by the militia and the prison guard. When I was in Wołów, a prison “atanda” ran a group of juveniles through a “fitness trail” as punishment for a “riot,” that is, a hunger strike. The kids were brought in from the juvenile prison in Wrocław, and they looked like little children scared to death. In 1976 violence that had been routinely applied to the “dregs of society” and disregarded by regular citizens surfaced and was used against anyone who ran into the ZOMO as they pacified Radom and Ursus.

The mechanism of lawlessness and violence was likely automatic to some extent; still, the authorities’ responsibility was clear. A psychosis of retaliation seized the Party and the government. Apparently Gierek was deeply hurt by the workers’ ingratitude. No matter how true this compromising rumor was, an antiworker hate campaign was launched in the mass media. Television eagerly broadcasted crudely orchestrated rallies that surely had approval from the highest centers of power or were organized at their request. Invective used in a similar situation by Gomułka’s government against shipyard workers was now augmented with an old Polish word, “warchoły” (“louts”). Jan Skórzyński in his excellent history of KOR correctly points out that Prime Minister Jaroszewicz’s and KC Secretary Kania’s interference in the courts, who they felt were too lenient on the Radom and Ursus “warchoły,” attests to the direct responsibility of the political leadership for the paroxysm of repression after June 1976.[27]

One of the traditions of the Polish intelligentsia is to respond to retaliation by the authorities with a sense of solidarity with its victims. This is a matter of honor, or rather of decency. But in 1976 they first needed to learn what was happening in the militia stations, interrogation rooms, and behind courthouse doors. They tried to attend the trial of the workers from Ursus and contacted the families of the accused. With the exception of the always dependable Jan Józef Lipski, initially they were not well-known intellectuals but relatively young people: scouts from the “Black Troop Number One,” scouts from “Walter’s Circle,” the March “Paratroopers,” and Catholic youth from the Warsaw Catholic Intelligentsia Club.[28]

These young people from Warsaw contacted the families of those imprisoned during the workers’ protests and brought them money from “illegal” collections, delivered coal during the winter, arranged for pro bono lawyers, while at the same time gathering information about harassment and repressed people. They were introduced to a world previously unknown to them. I will never forget Bogusława Blajfer, then a striking and well-dressed young woman from a "good family," describing how she had entered a one-room apartment in a Radom tenement to announce that a cart with a ton of winter coal was in front of the house.[29] She saw an emaciated woman with three children eating bread sprinkled with sugar for supper. "I stared at them, feeling like an ass in my white sheepskin." Although in 1968 Bogusława had been arrested and imprisoned with Andrzej Seweryn for distributing leaflets protesting the invasion of Czechoslovakia, her use of this crude word in her story caused me to understand how deeply she was touched by this brush with true poverty.

The shocking information acquired by these young people prompted a group of prominent intellectuals and public authorities to action. They decided, together with the initiators of aid to workers, to form the Committee for the Defense of Workers (KOR). I was not a member or even an active supporter, although on several occasions I voiced my opinions and tried to influence the decisions made by my KOR friends.

Andrzej Friszke and Jan Skórzyński have done a much better job writing about the four-year-long history of KOR than I would be able to do.[30] I do not have enough distance to be impartial or firsthand experience as a witness. However, I shall give my own assessment of this special group of people.

The emergence and activities of KOR followed two traditions of the Polish intelligentsia—both ordaining that they have a special mission. The older one is the romantic tradition and is connected with the ethos of the so-called aristocratic revolutionaries of the nineteenth century. This was an insurrectionary ethos that aimed to empower peasants in order to draw them into an armed struggle for independence. The other tradition (or perhaps just a new variation of the older) was connected with the pro-independence strain of Polish socialism and with the social ideal of working-class liberation. In this latter case, the mission of the intelligentsia was not just to organize to struggle against the partitioning powers but also to "carry the revolutionary spirit" to the working class. My generation grew up in the spirit of both these traditions, and they mingled in KOR. KOR members included Father Jan Zieja, who was the war chaplain of the Gray Ranks; Józef Rybicki, who was the commandant of the Warsaw Kedyw and the second chairman of WiN after the war; as well as Polish socialists such as Ludwik Cohn, Edward Lipiński, and Antoni Pajdak.[31] During the war Pajdak was the deputy delegate of the London-based government of Poland; he represented the PPS-WRN party, and then he was one of the sixteen leaders of the underground state abducted by the NKVD to Moscow and imprisoned in the USSR until 1955. The icons of these two traditions met in KOR to aid and defend victims of antiworker repression while at the same time salvaging the honor of the Polish intelligentsia stained with conformism. This was bluntly but accurately expressed by Andrzej Gwiazda at the First Solidarity Congress. He spoke up when the so-called true Poles tried to thwart the resolution on thanking KOR, who had decided to dissolve.[32] He said that shortly after June 1976 he and his wife went to Spain for a vacation. While enjoying the stunningly beautiful landscapes, they listened to Radio Free Europe reports on the torture of workers in Radom and Ursus. "When I was in Spain I felt as if someone had spat in my face. When I returned I learned that there were a few courageous people who had wiped it away." Gwiazda was an engineer at the Elmor factory, therefore he was part of the intelligentsia. The imperative of traditions instilled through generations and the imperative of honor blended together into an ethos that made the intelligentsia treat KOR with admiration and support it to the extent of each person's courage and abilities.

KOR is often considered a dissident group. The term "dissident" places the Polish defenders of workers in the same category as Soviet dissidents and the Czechoslovakian Charter 77. In my opinion this classification is false. The motivation of Soviet dissidents was not to give in to the dictate of lies and attest to their ethical convictions. In the USSR under Brezhnev, the most drastic cases of human rights abuses and political repression—which were selective but brutal—fell upon the dissidents themselves. Therefore the dissidents who were at large stood up for those who were in prisons, camps, or psychiatric hospitals. The desperate demonstration by several people who protested in Red Square against the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 was an exception. There had been no mass social protests in the USSR since 1961, when there was a bloodily suppressed workers' strike in Novocherkassk. In Czechoslovakia, after the invasion of the Warsaw Pact armies, the potential for mass protests was suppressed until 1989. The phenomenon of the "Polish months" was singular in communist Europe.[33] It resulted in the development of an opposition movement that was relatively small compared to Western democracies but with great social dynamics and political effectiveness. KOR was undoubtedly a product of this phenomenon. Such effectiveness was beyond the reach of the Charter 77. On the other hand, the Soviet dissidents programmatically renounced politics and in the 1980s found themselves outside of "perestroika," with the sole exception of Sakharov. KOR activists sometimes employed methods developed by Soviet dissidents, and they organized show meetings with the Charter 77. However, they were not dissidents but the center of an organized political opposition and the seed of a political alternative. KOR's additional (perhaps unintentional) achievement was to pave the road for other competing opposition groups, especially the Movement for Defense of Human and Civic Rights (ROPCiO), headed by Andrzej Czuma and Stefan Niesiołowski, and the Confederation of Independent Poland (KPN), headed by Leszek Moczulski.[34] The rivalry between these groups, as well as conflicts and hostilities within KOR itself, abounded with unbecoming episodes, but the bud of political pluralism sprouted among the quarrels, suspicions, and clashing egos.

Like Andrzej Gwiazda, I felt that the founding members of KOR had wiped the spit off my face. But from my perspective, the most important thing was that these people managed to break through the barriers erected by the dictatorship between the segments in society. They paved the road to freedom that in 1980–1981 led to an alliance between the intelligentsia and the workers within the mass movement of Solidarity.

Erasing the barriers in society was primarily a psychological phenomenon. The families of imprisoned or fired workers were learning through personal contacts, from Radio Free Europe, and sometimes from mimeographed bulletins that well-known writers were standing up for them. Everyone read *Ashes and Diamonds* by Jerzy Andrzejewski because it was required school reading.[35] The women from Radom tenements and drab Ursus blocks read *Pestka* by Anka Kowalska with tears of emotion.[36] They likely were impressed that the author traveled to Radom with money that had been collected for the imprisoned workers, attended their trials, and exposed herself to arrest and police station bunks. Some workers on their own initiative contacted KOR members such as Jacek Kuroń as well as others, whose contact information was written on mimeographed pieces of paper and broadcasted by Radio Free Europe. Intellectuals, students, scouts from the "Bunch of Wanderers" and the former "Walterites," as well as young people from the Catholic Intelligentsia Clubs met people whom they otherwise would not have encountered.[37] Over time they forged permanent links through common activities. These connections soon assumed an organized form. In September 1977 a journal with the historical title *The Worker* appeared.[38] It was duplicated in large runs and distributed in factories. Henryk Wujec (active in the Warsaw Catholic Intelligentsia Club) and March "Paratrooper" Jan Lityński, both KOR members, patiently and effectively organized a network of factory correspondents for the journal.[39] The first independent trade union emerged in February 1978 in Katowice.[40] It was quickly broken up by the secret police using brutal and extra-judicial repression. On April 29, 1978, the Founding Committee of the Free Trade Unions of the Coast (WZZ-W) was established in Gdańsk with Lech Wałęsa (who then worked in the Elektromontaż factory, but previously in the Gdańsk Shipyard), Anna Walentynowicz (a crane operator in the Gdańsk Shipyard), and Andrzej Gwiazda and Bogdan Lis, both of Elmor, as well as Alina Pienkowska, a nurse in the Gdańsk Shipyard clinic.[41] They all collaborated closely with Bogdan Borusewicz, a KOR member who was very active on the Coast.[42] These names speak for themselves. The Gdańsk committee of the WZZ-W played a very important role in giving the August strike the form that shaped Poland in the 1980s.

Many factors contributed to the August 1980 strikes. Obviously the memory of December 1970 and January 1971 played a role. The election of Karol Wojtyła as pope in October 1978 and his subsequent pilgrimage to Poland in the summer of 1977 are justly acknowledged as having a profound impact on the Poles. But the theme of ministry to workers in his homilies, especially those delivered in Poland, is certainly not sufficiently recognized.

NOTES

1. Trans. FLV. The Piasts were the first dynasty of Polish rulers.
2. *Tajne dokumenty Biura Politycznego*, *Grudzień 1970* (Londyn: Aneks, 1991), 127.
3. Franciszek Szlachcic (1920–1990) was a communist apparatchik and militia general. Initially affiliated with Mieczysław Moczar, later he became close to Edward Gierek. He served as Minister of Internal Affairs in 1971.
4. Tricity (Polish: Trójmiasto) is an urban area at the Baltic Sea coast consisting of three adjacent major towns: Gdańsk, Gdynia, and Sopot, and several smaller communities. The name Trójmiasto was used informally or semi-formally until 2007 when a formal "Tricity Charter" was signed.
5. Jan Szydlak (1925–1997) was a communist apparatchik and a KC secretary between 1968 and 1977. He was one of Gierek's closest collaborators. Józef Tejchma (b. 1927) is a communist politician. He was a Politburo member (1968–1980), Minister of Culture (1974–1978), and Minister of Education (1979–1980). *Tajne dokumenty Biura Politycznego: Grudzień 1970*, 202–3.
6. See Ewa Mianowska and Krzysztof Tylski, *Strajki łódzkie w lutym 1971: geneza*, *przebieg i reakcje władz* (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, 2008).
7. The Four Asian Tigers are the economies of Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan, which underwent rapid industrialization and maintained exceptionally high growth rates between the early 1960s and the 1990s.
8. Recidivists could be granted standard parole after serving two-thirds of their sentence.
9. The "Tatra Mountains climbers" (Polish: taternicy) was a dissident group arrested and sentenced in 1969–1970 for smuggling publications of the Paris *Kultura* to Poland via the Tatra Mountains.
10. Edward Lipiński (1888–1986) was an economist, social critic, and human rights advocate. He was among the founders of KOR.

11. Stanisław Kania (1927–2020) was a former Party activist and politician. He served as the secretary of the Warsaw Party Committee (1960–1968) and the first secretary (1980–1981).

12. The “Reservoir” case (Polish: *Zalew*), solved in 1971, was a criminal action by a group of high-ranking MSW officers who conducted illegal operations in the West (including robbery and larceny) and smuggled the loot to Poland purportedly to obtain means to fund activities of the Polish intelligence, and in part for personal gain. The name comes from their dachas at the Zegrze Reservoir near Warsaw where they hid their loot. Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs General Ryszard Matejewski (b. 1923) was the head of the group; he was sentenced in 1972 to twelve years in prison, of which he served six years.

13. Krzysztof Kieślowski (1941–1996) was a film director. Andrej Titkow (b. 1946) is a documentary director.

14. Bolesław Sulik (1929–2012) was a journalist and movie director.

15. Ewa Wacowska, *Rewolta szczecińska i jej znaczenie* (Mesnille-Roi: Institut Littéraire, 1971).

16. Igor Newerly (1903–1987) was a novelist and educator.

17. *Sami swoi*, translated as *All Friends Here* or *Our Folks*, literally “only the locals” (1967), is the first part of a movie trilogy by Sylwester Chęciński. It is the story of two quarreling families who were resettled to the Recovered Territories after Poland’s borders were shifted westward at the end of World War II, and who brought with them all their possessions and habits, including their feud.

18. The Recovered Territories (Polish: Ziemie Odzyskane) was an official term used in communist Poland to describe the territory of the former Free City of Danzig (Gdańsk) and the parts of prewar Germany that became part of Poland after World War II.

19. Galicia is a historical and geographic region in Central Europe. In the interwar period Galicia was a part of Poland with Lviv (Ukrainian: Львів; Russian: Львов; Polish: Lwów; German: Lemberg) as its principal city. After World War II Galicia was divided between Poland and the Soviet Ukraine.

20. The Club of Catholic Intelligentsia (Polish: Klub Inteligencji Katolickiej, KIK) is an organization of Catholic intellectuals. The KIK is organized into a series of local chapters (clubs). Founded after Gomułka’s Thaw in 1956, it

evolved into a mild Catholic-centered opposition group in communist Poland.

21. The “Movement” (Polish: *Ruch*) was the largest underground organization in pre-Solidarity Poland. It was active from mid-1965 to 1970, and at its peak it counted nearly one hundred members. In 1970 the organization was apprehended by the SB on the eve of its planned destruction of the Lenin Museum in the Tatra Mountains. During the ensuing trial, the *Ruch* leaders were sentenced to four to seven years in prison.

22. The changes to the Constitution, adopted on February 10, 1976, declared that Poland was a socialist country; the Party was the leading force in the building of socialism, and Poland was strengthening her friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.

23. The “Letter of 59” (also known as the “Memorial” or “Memorandum of 59”) was an open letter signed by sixty-six (initially fifty-nine, hence the name) Polish intellectuals who protested against the changes in the Constitution. Additional people signed the letter in January 1976.

24. This is a reference to Gierek’s epoch propaganda slogan, “So that Poland grows stronger and people grow wealthier.”

25. “Went to fight without weapons” (Polish: “poszli nasi w bój bez broni”) is a quote from a song from the 1863 January Insurrection.

26. A “fitness trail” (Polish: *ścieżka zdrowia*) is an ironic name for running a police gauntlet. It was applied to the protesters arrested in Radom, among others.

27. *Siła bezsilnych* (Warsaw: Świat Książki, 2012).

28. “The Black Troop Number One” (Polish official name: 1. Warszawska Drużyna Harcerska im. Romualda Traugutta “Czarna Jedynka”) is one of the oldest scouting units in Poland. For “Walter’s Circle,” see chapter 3, note 16.

29. Bogusława Blajfer (1945–2002) was an opposition activist with the “Paratroopers” and KOR. She immigrated to Sweden in 1979.

30. Andrzej Friszke and Andrzej Paczkowski, *Niepokorni: rozmowy o Komitecie Obrony Robotników: relacje członków i współpracowników Komitetu Obrony Robotników* (Kraków: Znak, 2008); Andrzej Friszke, *KOR: ludzie*, *działania*, *idee* ([S.l.]: Spółka Wydawnicza Norma, 1983); Jan

Skórzyński, *Siła bezsilnych: historia Komitetu Obrony Robotników* (Warszawa: Świat Książki—Weltbild Polska, 2012).

31. Reverend Jan Zieja (1897–1991) was a Catholic priest, social activist, and religious writer. During World War II he served as the chaplain for the Gray Ranks units of the Home Army. Ludwik Cohn (1902–1981) was a lawyer and socialist activist. Antoni Pajdak (1894–1988) was a lawyer and pro-independence and socialist activist.

32. The "true Poles" was the ironic name given to the partisans of a populist nationalistic current in Solidarity. On September 28, 1981, during the second part of the Solidarity Congress, Professor Lipiński announced the dissolution of KOR because of the completion of its mission. A delegate from Radom, Andrzej Sobieraj, proposed a motion to thank KOR. To prevent the adoption of this motion, a representative of the "true Poles" submitted a counter-motion that focused on Poland's Catholic traditions and included a sentence that thanked the democratic opposition in general. Eventually Congress adopted the Radom text.

33. The name "Polish months" (Polish: *polskie miesiące*) refers to the periodically erupting social protests in communist Poland: in June 1956 in Poznań, the Poznań June (Polish: *poznański czerwiec*); in March 1968, the March events (Polish: *wypadki marcowe*); in December 1970, the December events (Polish: *wydarzenia grudniowe*); in June 1976, the June 1976 (Polish: *Czerwiec 1976*), in August 1980, the August (Polish: *Sierpień*). The last "Polish month" to date is December 1981: the declaration of martial law by the communist authorities.

34. The Movement for Defense of Human and Civil Rights (Polish: Ruch Obrony Praw Człowieka i Obywatela, ROPCiO) was a right-wing political and social organization formed in March 1977. It resisted the regime by denouncing it for violating Polish and international laws. For Andrzej Czuma, see chapter 5, note 21. Stefan Niesiołowski (b. 1944) is a politician and member of the Union of European Democrats. In 1970 he was involved in the anticommunist group *Ruch*. Leszek Moczulski (b. 1930) is a journalist, historian, and politician.

35. *Ashes and Diamonds* is a novel by Jerzy Andrzejewski (1909–1983), a founding member of KOR. Written in 1948 as a socialist realist novel, in 1958 it was adapted into a film by Andrzej Wajda.

36. Anka Kowalska (1932–2008) was a writer and opposition activist. Her 1964 novel *Pestka* (*The Seed*) is a romantic story of an affair between a poet and a married man.

37. The “Bunch of Wanderers” (Polish: Gromada Włóczęgów) is a Scouting instructor’s unit and included such people as Antoni Macierewicz, Piotr Naimski, Janusz Onyszkiewicz, Wojciech Onyszkiewicz, Urszula Doroszewska, and others, later prominent dissidents.

38. *The Worker* (Polish: *Robotnik*) was a bi-weekly published between September 1977 and 1981 by a group of activists associated with KOR. They drew from the tradition of a journal by the same name published by Józef Piłsudski before World War I.

39. Henryk Wujec (1940–2020) was a politician. Educated as a physicist, he became a prominent opposition activist. Jan Lityński (1946–2021) was an opposition activist turned politician.

40. The Founding Committee of the Independent Trade Unions of Upper Silesia (Polish: Komitet Założycielski Wolnych Związków Zwodowych Górnego Śląska, WZZ-US) gathered on February 23, 1978; it consisted of six people: Kazimierz Świtoń and his son Jan, Roman Kściuszek, Władysław Sulecki, Ignacy Pines, and Tadeusz Kicki. Under pressure from the authorities, Sulecki permanently left Poland for Germany in 1979, and a conflict arose between Świtoń Sr. and Kściuszek. The WZZ-US activists played no major role in the summer 1980 strikes.

41. Anna Walentynowicz (1929–2010) was a worker and union activist. Andrzej Gwiazda, see chapter 5, note 7. Bogdan Lis (b. 1952) is a worker and union activist. Alina Pienkowska-Borusewicz (1952–2002) was a nurse and opposition activist. She was Bogdan Borusewicz’s wife.

42. Bogdan Borusewicz (b. 1949) is an opposition activist turned politician.

Chapter 7

Our Union of Brothers

Only by a miracle:
Polish nobility and people together—
Like two choirs in unison
—Zygmunt Krasiński, *Psalmy przysłości*[1]

[2]Gierek's decade was fruitful for my professional work. In 1975 I published *Organizacja gospodarcza państwa piastowskiego*, based on my doctoral dissertation that I had defended a year earlier.[3] I questioned the Marxist categorization, present since the early 1950s, of tenth- and eleventh-century Eastern European countries as "early medieval monarchies." My book was met with a considerable response among Polish historians, as well as Czech, Slovak, and Soviet scholars. My colleagues praised it, or at least discussed it. The censor did not object. The authorities had bigger problems than Marxist orthodoxy about feudalism—so I could write whatever I wished. I also wrote an essay on society in Lombard and Carolingian Italy for the volume *Italia* published in the series *Kultura Europy Średniowiecznej* (*The Culture of Early Medieval Europe*) by the PAN Institute of Material Culture where I worked.[4] In Poland it appeared only in 1980 because of the sluggish publishing cycle, but the Italian version was published at the beginning of 1978.[5] On the basis of that work, I earned my habilitation at the PAN History Institute in May 1978. Communist Poland respected hierarchies—even academic hierarchies. After my habilitation it was more difficult to harass me because the community of "senior researchers" was likely to protest defending their professional status. In 1978 the leadership of the History Institute asked me to write the first volume of a comprehensive survey *Chłopi w społeczeństwie polskim* (*Peasants in Polish Society*).[6] By August 1980 I had gathered the materials and was ready to start writing.

Between 1974 and 1976 I lived in Sobótka, which was only thirty-five kilometers from Wrocław. It was not easily accessible because of poor bus and train connections. There also were very few telephones in private households. In 1976 the Wrocław preservation authority restored a building on the corner of Więzienna and Nożownicza streets in Old Town for the Institute of History. Between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries the building had first housed a prison, then a pawn shop, and finally fell into ruin. During the siege of Wrocław in 1945, it may well have been used for its original function, and possibly prisoners were executed there. The 1976 restoration brought back the beauty of this place. It had a two-bedroom janitor's apartment on the second floor. Its back windows overlooked a gothic courtyard with lovely renaissance stonework and balconies, and the front windows looked out on Więzienna Street. But the institute had no budget to hire a janitor, so I got the apartment. It may sound strange, but my work and I really thrived in that place.

As befit a worker in communist Poland, I belonged to a trade union. This turned out to be truly relevant after August 1980, but just before that I went to Zakopane to a ZNP vacation house.[7] I did not have with me my Latvian-made transistor radio with frequencies that allowed one to listen to Radio Free Europe unscrambled. But in the Zakopane Book and Press Club, I spotted the headline "Strikes in Poland" on the front page of the Italian Communist Party daily *L'Unita*.

"THE BREST-LITOVSK TRUCE"

This headline referred to the July 1980 economic strikes that were primarily a reaction to the covert price hikes for meat introduced through the creation of so-called commercial shops.[8] In contrast to ordinary butcher shops with empty shelves, the goods in commercial shops were supposed to be available, but at higher prices. The authorities' economic policy convulsed between impossibilities—in February 1971 the government rescinded the price hike that had been introduced in the previous December, and another attempt at a hike in June 1976 was withdrawn after twenty-four hours. Commercial shops also turned out to be a political trap. They produced a creeping wave of economic strikes throughout Poland. Initially the demands only concerned pay increases, but each time the authorities gave in, one strike ended and another began. New types of strikes developed in Lublin and Świdnik. They put forward demands beyond salary increases, and striking committees and workers' commissions began to work together. This was not yet a formal structure like the Inter-Factory Striking Committees in the second half of August, but it already was coordinating actions in the participating factories in a spirit of solidarity. The strikers demanded new elections for the trade union factory councils. These elections were conducted in the Lublin railroad hub, and the strike activists won a majority on the new factory council.

By June 1980 the wave of strikes had not yet engulfed the coast. The Tricity was looking to the Lenin Shipyard for leadership, and Szczecin was looking to the Adolf Warski Shipyard. The local authorities, in the face of tensions and out of their own stupidity, told the Gdańsk Lenin Shipyard to fire Anna Walentynowicz. She was considered dangerous because she was active in the Founding Committee of the Free Trade Unions, had authority among the shipyard workers, and could make trouble. Walentynowicz had a textbook biography—a village orphan repressed by kulaks, turned into a welder thanks to communist Poland, sent to a 1953 international youth meeting in East Berlin as a Stakhanovite, decorated with the Gold Cross of Merit, and kindly maternal toward young workers. And now—despite her preretirement protection—she was fired. This illegal and outrageous decision detonated the strike that broke out in the Lenin Shipyard on August 14, 1980.

The workers demanded that Anna Walentynowicz be restored to work, along with Lech Wałęsa, who had been fired in 1976. Wałęsa assumed the leadership of the Striking Committee. The workers also demanded a pay increase of 2,000 zlotys and a monument to the fallen workers near the Shipyard's Gate Number 2 where the first workers had been killed in December 1970. After three days of negotiation, the shipyard administration essentially agreed to these demands (an increase of 1,500 zlotys, a commemorative plaque near the gate, and return to work for Wałęsa and Walentynowicz). At that point Wałęsa declared victory. But in the meantime the neighboring shipyards and cooperating factories went on strike. Public transportation also was stopped. There was no way that the strikers could have their demands met without the flagship that to them was the Gdańsk Shipyard. The desperate envoys from the striking factories that had joined the shipyard's strike now begged the shipyard to continue the strike in the name of solidarity and for the fulfilment of their common demands.

This was not an easy decision for the Striking Committee that had just declared victory. The turning point was the emotional reaction of three women: Alina Pienkowska, Anna Walentynowicz, and Henryka Krzywonos (a tram driver representing public transportation) who ran to the gate and called for the exiting workers to remain in the name of solidarity with other factories.[9] Soon they were joined by that great instinctual leader Lech Wałęsa. The next day the strikers who had left the shipyard returned, and the strike was saved, although now it had to be held to a greater purpose than just the same pay increases for the other factories. On August 17 the Inter-Factory Striking Committee (MKS) was established, and the famous list of twenty-one demands was compiled. Bogdan Borusewicz, the political brains behind the scenes, struck down the demand for free elections in the name of political realism ("this would be tantamount to removing the Party from power"). He also insisted that instead of abolishing censorship, they should only demand legal limitations on it. Still, the first and most important demand—that workers be allowed to create free trade unions independent from the Party and state—threatened the very foundations of communist dictatorship. Poland was on the brink of a revolution.

A revolution does not easily fit into the rational categories of political science because it is an unusual and unique state of mind of a large mass of people. A revolution develops within a "normalcy" that goes on for a long time, but it actually negates that normalcy in an act of self-liberation. For the several thousand workers who occupied the Gdańsk Shipyard and associated factories on August 18, 1980, the slogan of "trade unions independent from the Party and state" was similar to the vision of Liberté who led people to the barricades. Soon this was also the reality for hundreds of thousands of participants in solidarity strikes all over Poland, and to the millions of Poles who through their activities, or just by joining the union, created the great Solidarity.[10]

The purpose of a barricade is to protect, but it is neither a safe place for the fighters who erected it nor for the people led by Liberté, nor for a nation that lives in the shadow of a foreign empire. But the wise warnings from realists who beg crowds to slow down with reclaiming freedom are no good. The state of mind of the millions is also a reality that the realists should take into account if they want to be effective.

It is not true that crowds are deaf to rational arguments. In October 1956 I had watched Leszek Goździk and a few others manage to effectively evoke rational arguments and find a common language with an emotional crowd of thousands. I tried to emulate them. The method was simple—treat the people with respect and invite them to think together. Every person in the crowd felt that Goździk was speaking to them personally, and together with him they were making decisions appropriate to the situation.

This is not a prescription for manipulation. Respect for a crowd must be authentic. They easily recognize lies and do not tolerate being manipulated. True respect requires the acknowledgment of the principal tenets that determine the state of mind of the protesting crowd. A realist who wants to influence a revolution cannot demand that a crowd give up its fundamental values. A realist accepts these values and thinks about the possibilities of their implementation while considering existing circumstances and dangers. The result is always uncertain, as the circumstances and dangers do not depend on us, and our assessment of the situation is often erroneous. But to implore a revolution to disappear in the name of realism is utterly unrealistic.

These remarks are based on my own experiences both from before and after August 1980. I doubt I would have been able to express my thoughts this way at the onset of the Solidarity revolution, but this kind of thinking quickly became a compass rose for my activities. I took the first news about the Inter-Factory Striking Committee and the list of twenty-one demands as a portent of alarm and hope. As a revolutionary with a tumultuous past followed by ten years of relatively calm scholarly activities, this signaled to me that I needed to redirect my life again.

First I decided to go to Warsaw. I wanted to talk to Jacek Kuroń about what to do about the situation. I arrived there on August 21, 1980, but I did not manage to see him, because like the majority of active KOR members, he had been arrested. I talked to his wife, Grażyna, who told me the latest news. Then I went to see Bronisław Geremek.[11] He told me about a letter signed by sixty-four intellectuals, mostly from the circles of the Society for Scholarly Courses (TKN), the think tank “Experience and

Future” (DiP), and the Club of Catholic Intelligentsia (KIK).[12] The letter called for compromise. As Geremek was telling me that the letter’s organizer had tried to contact me unsuccessfully (I was not convinced), the doorbell rang and the secret police entered. They searched the apartment, assigning me the role of official witness, and they took Geremek with them. Over the next two days I called his house and mutual friends to learn if he had been released. Finally Tadeusz Kowalik told me, “Geremek went THERE,” that is, to the shipyard.[13] Soon I learned that he went there with Tadeusz Mazowiecki and that the Commission of the Advisors of the Inter-Factory Striking Committee was being assembled to follow them to Gdańsk.

KOR played the role of icebreaker for the unofficial political life at the end of the 1970s. It cleared the waters for new formations of political opposition as well as different citizens’ initiatives, many of them more moderate than KOR. These included the TKN, which infuriated the Party and the secret police because of its Flying University lectures. The TKN gathered intellectuals who were more interested in seeking dialogue with the authorities than organizing social pressure, as did the KIK circle and the DiP group. My 1976 letter to Gierek was of interest to these people, and it had the potential to become relevant to the intellectuals who in August 1980 called for compromise.

In Gierek’s speech at the KC Fourth Plenary Session on August 24, 1980, which was broadcast on TV, he quoted a sentence from the “Letter of 64” that “no one should bet the fate of our country on a single horse.”[14] The first secretary used this allusion to convey that prolonging the social conflict was dangerous to national security, therefore the strikers had to compromise. He also implied that Poland’s authorities had to do so as well—that is, they had to yield in some matters. On the same day at the Warsaw airport SB agents detained a few members of the Commission of the Advisors who were about to fly to Gdańsk, but then the orders were changed and the advisors were allowed to go. The authorities may have been hoping that the advisors would convince the Striking Committee that the demand to create a trade union independent from the Party was unrealistic. They may have counted on this because the opposition intellectuals believed that this demand undermined the foundation of the system, therefore it would be unacceptable to the government. I believed this too; however, the situation on the ground was determined not only by the systemic principles but also by the resolve of the strikers.

I was aware I could not go *there* without the consent of the advisors. From what Kowalik had told me before they left, I inferred that I was being kept in reserve. I met with Zbigniew Romaszewski, who had not been arrested yet, and he sent me to Józef Śreniowski, who was in hiding in Warsaw after returning from Gdańsk.[15] Śreniowski gave me the news I was waiting for—I was to join the advisors. This was an overblown interpretation of something Waldemar Kuczyński had said—that they did not need any more economists or lawyers, instead they needed Karol Modzelewski. Kuczyński probably meant that I would not be swayed by the emotions of the crowd and would have the courage to face the strikers and convince them to give up on their first demand—the union. Śreniowski took it as a request and instructed me how to get to the shipyard without being stopped by the secret police. I was to purchase a ticket to Tczew and then switch to the commuter rail. I was to get out at the Gdańsk Politechnika station instead of the Gdańsk Stocznia station near the Second Gate where most of the agents were positioned. Then I was to enter the shipyard through the Third Gate, which was monitored less vigilantly.

On the afternoon of August 26, I arrived at the Third Gate. Instead of factory guards, it was guarded by shipyard workers wearing helmets and red-and-white armbands. I showed them my PAN ID, and I told them I was to meet the advisors. Two young workers in work clothes and armbands led me toward the BHP hall.[16] They asked me about the news from Warsaw. I told them that KOR members were being held by the authorities without prosecutorial charges, except that every forty-eight hours they were transferred from one police station to another. “We are not with KOR,” protested my guides. The conversation switched to the strike. The young workers felt empowered and were certain of victory.

“No one is strong enough to oppose us.”

I half-jokingly protested.

“Except maybe the Soviet Army?”

“What does the Soviet Army have to do with trade unions?”—my young companions were bewildered. They were no older than twenty-two or twenty-three, but the older workers I talked to that day were in a similar mood.

At the entrance to the BHP hall, my two young escorts said, “Here you are,” and disappeared. As strike guards they did not seem professional. I found Bronisław Geremek easily. Upon seeing me he could not hide his embarrassment. I immediately understood this was all a misunderstanding, and he promptly made it clear.

“Your name is too big for this delicate situation. Vice Prime Minister Jagielski’s people who came to the shipyard with the governmental delegation are already saying that the Commission of the Advisors has been taken over by antisocialist elements.”

Tadeusz Mazowiecki agreed, and I did not protest. Indeed, I thought they were right. If the negotiations were hanging by a thread, and the authorities’ people were making such accusations, then it would be too much if the advisors included a recidivist with two sentences for fighting against the People’s Poland. I said I would leave the next morning. Mazowiecki softened his stance; he suggested that I stay in the shipyard (but not as an official advisor) because history was being made, and it was worth seeing. He was of course right, but I did not want to be just an onlooker. The advisors invited me to stay in the shipyard until evening, and then to join them in the nearby convent where they were sleeping. I would stay overnight and then leave. I readily agreed, especially because I wanted to convince them that they should add a demand to free the KOR members to their demand for assurances against repression for the strikers and the strike supporters.

I argued that without releasing the KOR members, the assurances granted to the strikers and their supporters would be worthless—good for no more than toilet paper (this was during constant toilet paper shortages). I told this to the advisors with whom I was staying. I had wanted to say this at the meeting of the entire Commission of the Advisors, but my colleagues did not want to let me attend. The commission was a formal body with its own procedures, and it did not admit outside people. There were also worries that word of my participation might reach the governmental side.

I spent the few remaining hours wandering through the shipyard. Mazowiecki was right—it was worth it. Awed and amazed, I watched workers from the strike guard pouring out three bottles of vodka that had been smuggled in. It was clear that the workers were sorry to lose the vodka, but nevertheless they approved of the actions of their colleagues in red-and-white armbands. There was prohibition during the strike, and the strikers felt they had to keep discipline. The vast shipyard looked like a camp of volunteers, except there was no anarchy but exemplary self-organization. This was a scrap of free Poland in the land of the enslaved People's Poland. Two days later I visited Professor Gieysztor in Warsaw and told him what I had seen in Gdańsk. He commented, "Karol, this sounds exactly like the mood in Warsaw during the first days of the Uprising."

This comment from AK Lieutenant "Borodzicz" sounded more as a warning than nostalgia. But my few hours in the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk were enough to find out that with a growing archipelago of striking free republics, the concept of giving up on the demand for independent trade unions in the name of realism was unrealistic. I saw one of those islands of that archipelago from the train on my way back from Gdańsk to Warsaw on August 27, 1980. It was a big factory in Pruszcz Gdański. It had a long banner posted on the front wall of a large building that looked just like many other banners—red fabric with white lettering displaying some slogan such as "The Program of the Party Is the Program for the Nation." But this time the banner showed a simple message, "MKS—Solidarity." This meant they were participating in a solidarity strike together with other factories and had their MKS representative in the Gdańsk Shipyard. This was a solidarity strike because the demands were common and not particular to one factory, and the decision on ending the strike was to be undertaken by all the striking crews together and not by each one for themselves. The striking bulletin published in the shipyard by KOR member Konrad Bieliński also had the title Solidarity.[17] The word "solidarity" was very powerful even before it became the name for the Union.

On August 26 when I was still in the shipyard, public transportation in Wrocław went on strike. The principal factories in town also ceased working. But because I was persuaded by the rejection I got from the advisors of the Gdańsk MKS, I was not eager to return to Wrocław to the bus depot that was the home of the regional striking committee. I decided to stay in Warsaw to talk to KOR members who were still at large. It did not cross my mind to try to contact people from the Party establishment, even informally. But I ran into Dariusz Fikus of the *Polityka* weekly whom I had met through Anka Kowalska.[18] Upon learning that I had been in Gdańsk, he asked me to visit the editors and describe what I had seen to Mieczysław F. Rakowski. *Polityka*'s longtime editor-in-chief, Rakowski was a KC member who had contacts within the opposition-leaning part of the intelligentsia and relatively good access to Gierek. I did not tell Rakowski why I went to the shipyard, nor did I mention the MKS advisors, but I related to him the mood among the strikers and told him there was no possibility that they would give up on their first demand—the free trade unions. This was not surprising to Rakowski. He told me that he had accompanied Kazimierz Barcikowski to the Szczecin Shipyard and had the same impression.[19] "I have tried to explain to the comrades that in this situation they need to sign a 'Brest-Litovsk treaty,' but I doubt they will go for it."

The term "Brest-Litovsk treaty" refers to the armistice signed in March 1918 in Brest-Litovsk between Soviet Russia on one side and Germany and Austria on the other. In this treaty the Bolsheviks paid the hefty price of giving up a vast territory in order to survive. But soon after, the German empire collapsed, and Austria-Hungary fell apart. The Bolsheviks revoked the treaty and regained most of their lost land by military force. In the vocabulary of communist parties, the popularity of the term "Brest-Litovsk treaty" was not due to historical erudition but to the *History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks): Short Course*, a book ubiquitous among Party activists that during Stalinist times was hammered into the heads of millions of people during countless training sessions. The term was one of the catchphrases introduced to mass circulation by the *Short Course*, and it meant, literally or metaphorically, a retreat—forced by unfavorable circumstances, thus justified—from a position that at the moment was impossible to hold but needed to be regained as soon as the balance of power changed. Rakowski used this phrase in his conversation with me three or four days before the signing of the Gdańsk Accord. Later he would not say this; to the contrary, in *Polityka* he wrote about the need "to respect your partner." In the Party, and especially in Moscow, he was seen as a liberal, or even a Social-Democrat, which bordered on anathema for the communists. But his words in late August 1980 stick in my memory, and they are significant when after so many years we think about the way the Party politicians understood the situation at that time.

To sign and comply with the agreements that authorized the MKZs in Gdańsk, Szczecin, Jastrzębie Zdrój, Wrocław, Łódź, Wałbrzych, and other centers to create independent trade unions was tantamount to a political death sentence for the system. This was a suspended sentence, but without "turning back the course of events," execution was unavoidable. The Party leadership should have realized this. The minutes of the meetings of the top leaderships of the Party and the MSW were top secret in the 1980s. Today they have been opened and are available to historians. Some of these documents have been published, and I know of some of them thanks to Andrzej Friszke who let me read his book *Rewolucja "Solidarności"* before publication.[20] The picture that emerges is sometimes surprising.

During the Politburo meeting on the morning of August 26, 1980, none of the participants considered it possible to agree to the creation of independent trade unions. They knew Lenin's formula that in a communist state, trade unions were to be a "conveyor belt" delivering the will of the Party to the masses of workers. They stuck to that principle not for ideological reasons—the majority of them were pragmatists—but because it was a foundational principle of the system they directed. In this system all social life was a kind of puppet theater that the hierarchically organized Party animated by pulling strings. This was what its "leadership role" was about. Excluding trade unions from the Party leadership role would be tantamount to cutting the strings with which it directed labor relations and controlled the multimillion-strong workforce. In a sense, trade union pluralism was more dangerous than a pluralism of political parties because it would bring to legal existence a mighty alternative force capable of effectively blocking the economic decisions of the ruling group that until now had held undivided and uncontrolled power.

It was no wonder the Politburo members seemed to rule out such a possibility. But in the afternoon of the same day, Mieczysław Jagielski, who had negotiated in Gdańsk on behalf of the government, and Kazimierz Barcikowski, who had served the same role in Szczecin, joined the Politburo meeting. They made it clear that without the acceptance of the creation of independent trade unions the workers would not call off their strikes. They both advocated to create independent trade unions, and at the same time they expressed their hope that the Party would gradually regain control. Thus the principal government negotiators and advocates of the accords treated them from the beginning as “Brest-Litovsk treaties.” Their view still did not prevail at the August 26 meeting, but the expanding protests over the next few days, particularly the coal miners joining the strike and the creation of the MKZ in Jastrzębie, sealed the deal. At meetings on August 30, the Politburo first, and then the Central Committee, finally agreed with the negotiators. Stanisław Kania argued, “A step to the right is better than a step into the abyss.” As Kania told the committee, on that day some seven hundred thousand workers were on strike in several hundred workplaces over the country. The militia alone would not be able to pacify the society on such a scale, nor would the army, according to a competent assessment by Defense Minister Wojciech Jaruzelski. The Kremlin warned against the “anarcho-syndicalist” threat, but the USSR was involved in Afghanistan and would not be able to intervene right away. It is also important to consider the psychological reservations of Gierek’s group against possible bloodshed. Gierek must have realized that the signing of the accords could be his last decision. He preferred to leave rather than shoot. To be fair, we should give him credit for this.

The very next day, after the agreements were signed in Gdańsk, Szczecin, and Jastrzębie, the “doves” in the ruling Party apparatus faced an enormous task. They had to gradually restore the Party’s “leadership role” in the new trade unions that were to be created as organizations independent from the Party. Already at the registration of Solidarity, there was an attempt to impose a structure on the “independent self-governing trade union” that would disperse the great striking movement. The MKZs had united the factory crews of different industries in the fight for a common cause, and they won because of the solidarity of the entire country. Now the authorities presented a choice—either you split into many countrywide unions limited to particular trades or into separate unions: territorial, local, or even single-factory, according to the reach of particular striking committees. This was the only choice given to the Union’s Founding Committees by the September 14, 1980, Resolution of the Council of State on the registration of new trade unions. The Party attempted to implement the principle of "divide and rule." This led to the so-called registration crisis—the first large-scale conflict between the new union movement and the government. It ended successfully for Solidarity on November 10, 1980.

I was back in Wrocław on September 1, 1980, in the morning when the first trams were about to run. That night the envoys to the Inter-Factory Striking Committee in Gdańsk had returned to Wrocław, bringing back the text of the accord that included the provision that independent self-governing trade unions could be established countrywide and not just on the coast. Wrocław declared the end of the strike, and the Inter-Factory Striking Committee became the Inter-Factory Founding Committee (MKZ) of the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union (NSZZ).

Dissuaded by Geremek and Mazowiecki, I did not try to join the advisors of the emerging trade union movement. But I was a member of the Union of Polish Teachers (ZNP), and nobody barred me from participating in its meetings and exercising my voting rights. At the general assembly of ZNP members from all units of the Wrocław PAN, the ZNP council was disbanded. Almost everyone present left the ZNP and joined Solidarity. They elected a Founding Committee representing the Wrocław PAN units, and I became its vice chairman and delegate to the MKZ. There was no doubt that our decision meant joining that structure; nobody thought of creating a separate union for employees in the sciences, technology, and education, whereas our Warsaw colleagues were leaning toward such a solution. It was clear that we had to be together with workers. This was Wrocław, and not Warsaw.

The MKZ was no longer in the bus depot but in an apartment assigned by the Wrocław municipality at Red Square (today Solidarity Square). I was well received there and was immediately assigned to the commission that was charged with preparing a draft of the bylaws for the Union. It was obvious that it was to be a countrywide organization. I worked together with Kazimierz Pieprz of the Wrocław Machinery Trade Center, Krzysztof Turkowski of the Ossolineum National Institute, and three lawyers who provided legal expertise (Joanna Ładomirska, Lech Adamczyk, and Tadeusz Kaszubski). We worked on the procedures for declaring strikes. My other personal contribution to the Wrocław project was naming the Union bodies, later included in the Solidarity bylaws. I had been impressed by the [1936] Spanish Workers' Commissions, and following their pattern I suggested calling the governing bodies of the union at the factory level Factory Commissions (Komisje Zakładowe, KZ), those at the regional level Regional Commissions (Komisje Regionalne), and the one at the countrywide level, Country Commission (Komisja Krajowa, KK). These names found approval, perhaps because the more standard term "governing board" (*zarząd*) had bad connotations for the thousands of union activists. Why would anyone govern us? We govern ourselves here!

I think our draft was ready on September 12, and we took it to Gdańsk. But the Gdańsk MKZ already had their own bylaws project. This would not be a reason for concern; we expected that there would be many projects that would lead to the emergence of one common set of bylaws through further discussion. But alas the Gdańsk project had the name "Independent Self-Governing Trade Union of the Coast" (Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy Wybrzeża) in its title and a corresponding two-level structure: a factory board and regional board, but no countrywide structure. The Gdańsk MKZ, leader of the countrywide solidarity strike, now wanted to separate and create a union apart from other regions. This was still before the resolution of the Council of State that would try to push the union movement in that direction.[21] On its own initiative, our flagship was about to head toward the port where the authorities wanted it to go.

We went to see Wałęsa. I had not known him before, but without much ado I started addressing him by his first name (as the other union activists did, unlike the advisors who called him "Mr. Wałęsa"). In a raised voice I explained the reasons why Gdańsk's bylaws would be tantamount to leaving all those who had supported them with solidarity strikes out in the cold. "Lechu" was rather defensive. He said he had a terrible headache and sent us to the advisors. They reassured us that they would take our position into consideration, but this time I sensed falsehood in their words, and I decided they were being evasive. So we went to the members of the Gdańsk MKZ executive board who came from the pre-August opposition, that is, the WZZ-W, and we encountered a firm but at least openly stated refusal. Only Lech Kaczyński showed some understanding of our position, but as the others squarely said no, he was like the one swallow that does not a summer make.[22] Joanna Duda-Gwiazda, Bogdan Borusewicz, and Andrzej Gwiazda expressed their concern that creating a central union authority would lead to the bureaucratization of the spontaneous social movement, which would suit the Party well as it loved centralization.[23] I argued that the tactics of the “owners of the People’s Poland” would want to capitalize on the divisions between us, but my WZZ-W colleagues turned a deaf ear. I had the impression that they were afraid of the unknown that was inundating them from all sides of the country. They had waged a long fight before August 1980 and were a tight bunch. Now people who had only just joined were coming in from Silesia, Wrocław, Wałbrzych, Poznań, Łódź, and other places. Who knew these people—maybe they were directed by the Party or the SB. The idea was: let’s stick to our own, for at least we trust each other.

It was deeply ironic that shortly thereafter violent conflicts laced with distrust and suspicion erupted within this group. But it was cohesive at that moment. My last hope to soften these people was by persuading Jacek Kuroń, the highest authority for them. “We can’t convince the bishops, so let’s go for the pope,” I told my Wrocław colleagues who were in despair over the attitude of the people from Gdańsk. Jacek was in Gdańsk, but because of some controversies among the advisors, he had no access to the MKZ offices. He immediately grasped our point and said firmly, “Yes, we have to register as one union.” I decided this was a reason for optimism, and we returned to Wrocław hoping that things would go our way. The verdict was to be declared in a few days. The countrywide meeting of all MKZ delegates was called for September 17, 1980, in Gdańsk.

Our report on the Gdańsk secessionism and how we tried to soften it caused great anxiety in the Wrocław MKZ. I was co-opted by the MKZ executive board. It was decided that I would go to the September 17 countrywide meeting as the official head of the Wrocław delegation. The delegation also included two other members of the board, Antoni Skinder and Kazimierz Pieprz, as well as Kaszubski as legal counsel. A delegation from Wałbrzych headed by the chairman of the MKZ there and a miner from the “Wałbrzych” coal mine, Jerzy Szulc, went with us from the very beginning.

On September 16 we were in Gdańsk, a day before the countrywide meeting, and we immediately found that the promise to take our position into consideration had been empty. The bylaws project for the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union that encompassed one region had been prepared for the entire country. It already had been approved by vote in Gdańsk. Although the phrase “of the Coast” had disappeared from the title, the rest remained unchanged, that is, two levels—a factory board and a regional board. Nothing more—no countrywide body or structure. The only thing offered to others was the suggestion to adopt—if they wished—the same bylaws, and to join Gdańsk in registering their unions in court. This could, at least theoretically, prevent the authorities from treating the registration applications differently because the bylaws would be identical. But these would be entirely separate organizations because a union whose highest body is a regional board cannot govern beyond a region.

We had no choice but to carry out our plan the next day at the plenary session, in spite of our hosts’ position. We had the great authority of Gdańsk against us, but a decisive majority of delegates from all around Poland backed us, justly concerned that “left to ourselves they will kill us one by one.” The communist authorities were afraid of Gdańsk and tiptoed around it, something that could have made the Gdańsk union feel powerful and given it a false sense of security. In other places, the local Party and administration were treating the founding bodies of the independent union with disrespect and open hostility. Even in Wrocław with its six-day strike, we encountered a complete ban on information in the local press, along with various other forms of obstruction. Moreover, the pronouncements by the Party dignitaries were a bad sign. Like all the delegates of the Founding Committees who came to Gdańsk on September 17, we thought that we had to defend ourselves against attacks and manipulation by the dictatorial authorities. We needed to join forces and coordinate our decisions within a single organization.

However, even if the delegates from different places wanted the same thing, they did not know each other. So on the basis of my opposition contacts, on the day before the plenary session I invited Zbigniew Bujak and Lech Dymarski (the heads of the Warsaw and Poznań delegations) to the room where the Wałbrzych and Wrocław delegates were staying.[24] Wiesław Chrzanowski, one of the advisors who was sympathetic to us, also came.[25] We quickly reached agreement, and I immediately wrote and ran through the draft of a resolution to be presented the next day to the assembly. This was a resolution on the creation of a single countrywide union with a Countrywide Commission (KK) as its governing body. The KK would consist of the MKZs represented by their authorized delegates. At that time the old official trade unions organized by trades were leaving the CRZZ one after another and taking the name Independent Self-Governing Trade Unions (of Metal Workers, Textile Workers, Construction Workers, etc.).[26] This cornucopia of names could cause chaos and confusion, so when I was writing our resolution, it occurred to me that we needed a name that would clearly distinguish us. I remembered the inscription on the banner in the Pruszcz Gdański factory and the bulletin published in the Gdańsk Shipyard during the August strike, and without thinking I wrote, "We resolve to create a countrywide trade union with the name Independent Self-Governing Trade Union 'Solidarity,' headquartered in Gdańsk. The Union is to be active throughout the whole territory of the Polish People's Republic." The name "Solidarity" was obvious. It was the battle cry of the August strike, a perfect expression of its participants from different parts of the country. It was a word displayed on buildings and factory walls. Even the logo already existed. We agreed that I would present this proposal on behalf of the Wrocław and Wałbrzych delegations and with the support of Warsaw (that is, the MKZ Mazowsze) and Poznań.

The delegations representing over thirty MKZs (almost two hundred people) participated in the meeting the next morning. I had a distinct feeling that the agenda was set to prevent any surprises. First the representatives from each MKZ gave a progress report on the establishment of their respective unions. This dragged on forever. Some speakers pointed out the obstacles put in their way by the local authorities that threatened the August accords, and they concluded with appeals for unity. Then the chair would interrupt and warn that next on the agenda was the discussion on the structure of the unions. I think I had assigned Antoni Skinder to report on the Wrocław MKS, and with growing impatience I was waiting to talk about the most important thing. It was already well into the afternoon when Zbigniew Bujak asked on behalf of the MKZ Mazowsze to open the floor to Jan Olszewski as legal counsel.

Olszewski pointed out that the resolution of the Council of State adopted three days earlier threatened the independence and self-governance of our movement because it only allowed registration of single-trade or single-region unions, and it tried to block the legalization of a multiregion countrywide union. This gave the authorities the ability to manipulate the unions, including selective registration of some of them and rejection of others. The chair tried to take back the floor from Olszewski (because "he wasn't speaking on topic"). This was an outrageous claim. Olszewski was the last speaker on this agenda topic, and the next topic was to be about the structure of the trade union movement. I should have politely submitted a formal motion, but instead, disregarding the rules of order, I roared, "Let him speak!" The floor picked up my call, and Olszewski was allowed to continue.

After a break we moved on to a discussion on the structure of the union. I was the first to speak. In a situation where activists in a new movement come from different parts of the country and do not know each other, the only means to forge communication and make everybody feel united is an effective speech from the podium. At the beginning I referred to Olszewski's probing analysis of the Council of State's resolution on registration of trade unions. "If you are unable to strangle someone"—and the audience was clear that I was talking about the authorities' attitude toward the emerging trade union movement—"then you can try to lead the person up the garden path. But there is a solution—to not allow yourself to be lead up this path." I gave the negative example of the Huta Katowice MKZ motion to be registered as a separate trade union already filed in court. The news about this motion was immediately trumpeted countrywide in the media. The case hardly required further explanation; before the break, most of the speakers had been presenting the obstacles piled up before the founders of the new unions and pointed out the concerted silence in the local and countrywide press. Almost everyone who was participating in our meeting had read the triumphant announcement in *Trybuna Ludu* on the Huta Katowice registration motion as a manipulation by the Party propaganda. I sensed this and moved straight to my point. If we followed the Council of the State's resolution and the Party media, "therefore if as many unions would emerge in Poland as speakers who are presenting the situations in their particular MKZs today, we are finished. We are finished—perhaps with exception of the coast in the short term, but it also will be finished—it will just be the last one." This simple reasoning was met with applause. Then the room applauded my conclusion, "We need one countrywide independent and self-governing trade union now."

By arguing that the union needed a single set of bylaws, and that they could not be the Gdańsk bylaws that did not include a countrywide body, I had to go against the meeting hosts. One of their offended partisans tried to interrupt, "Where was Wrocław when the coast was on strike?" This was exactly what I needed. I responded that Wrocław backed the coast with a general strike that started on August 26, and this influenced the mood and results of the Gdańsk negotiations. "Gdańsk won the strike for all of us, but we should not forget that it won the strike strengthened by solidarity strikes all over Poland. Otherwise Gdańsk would not have won [applause]. The coast will commit suicide if it rejects the rest of Poland [applause]."

At the end of my speech, after I announced that I would read the resolution sponsored by Wrocław and Wałbrzych and supported by Warsaw and Poznań, Lech Bądkowski, the chairman of the meeting, on behalf of the hosts unexpectedly told me that my time was up.[27] I already said what I needed to advocate for our idea, and I could not be prohibited from proposing a resolution. So I read the resolution, which the room received with applause, or rather accepted by acclaim as there was no voting afterward. Lech Wałęsa got up and took the mic from me, and as soon as the applause subsided, he said firmly, "Agreed. This is what we are going to do. The only thing is we have to make sure that this countrywide commission does not impose its decisions on the regions. Let's end the meeting, and then the chairmen of the delegations will meet in a small hall on the second floor to iron out the details of registering together."

This was the first but by no means the last time I saw Wałęsa make a sudden flip. He was not known for pedantically adhering to procedure, and he could instantly change his decisions prompted by his intuition, sensing the mood, and calculating very quickly, even if not always accurately. This time he left not just most of the advisors in the cold but also his own combatants from the Founding Committee WZZ-W, as well as the Gdańsk MKZ activists. He did not need the vote to know where the majority was; he joined those who came from all around the country and put himself at the head of the great countrywide movement. This fundamentally strengthened his position and greatly increased the burden of responsibility that fell on his shoulders. This responsibility frightened him, but his anxiety did not stop him. These factors need to be remembered when we think of the very special relationship between this charismatic leader and the great crowds that the Solidarity revolution set into motion.

Immediately after the verdict—this was a verdict even if the authorities still tried to turn the river back—I exchanged a few harsh words with Bronisław Geremek and Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the Union's two most influential advisors. Geremek could not contain his frustration. He was a man of great mind and character, but in his fury he was inarticulate. Mazowiecki also thought things had gone wrong, but he was able to explain his views. He said that the solution we had accepted would lead straight to a confrontation, and this confrontation could waste the compromise reached with the August Gdańsk Accord. He literally told me, "They won't register this union because it would have too much power." I responded that this was precisely why they would have to register it, even if they surely would not want to. In a sense we both were correct, or rather we expressed two different but complementary arguments. In any case, our differences did not prevent us from collaborating amicably and effectively at key moments in the registration crisis.

The activists of the emerging union who thought strategically tried to figure out the intentions of the "government side." They took their cues from the changing messages of the official propaganda, public speeches by Party leaders, and current decisions made by the authorities. We knew next to nothing about the closed-door meetings of the narrow leadership of the Party, but we were prone to assume that our opponents were following a coherent and deliberate strategy and Machiavellian tactics. The secret documents of the PZPR and the MSW are now open and accessible to historians. The picture emerging from them does not confirm our assumptions. The ruling circles roughly knew what they wanted, but they had no idea how to achieve it. The emergence of the countrywide union greatly complicated their game. Initially the central press in Stefan Olszowski's experienced hands, as well as local papers (with the exception of Gdańsk), tried to simply ignore the undesired development. But when over a period of a few weeks, five million people (or probably more like seven million, including several hundred thousand Party members) switched from the old trade unions to Solidarity, the press could no longer pretend that nothing had happened. A "Brest-Litovsk treaty" did not exclude skirmishes or even major battles during which the opponent was to be sternly criticized—therefore somehow named. Thus the cursed name "Solidarity" became familiar in the official newspapers. This fact by no means guaranteed court registration but was a sign that the independent union de facto had become part of the Polish political landscape.

Rejecting registration of the Union under the pretext that its structure did not comply with the September 14 resolution of the Council of the State was not an option. It would be clear to everyone that the authorities were unilaterally breaking the August accords. This would inevitably result in a general strike with such a mood in society that the "government side" would be put in a losing position from the start. The scale of the one-hour "warning" strike on October 3 left no doubts. The KKP called the strike to demand the implementation of the pay increases negotiated in the Gdańsk Accord and the registration of Solidarity.

Unable to subject the Union to "the leadership role of the Party" in reality, the authorities decided to score a pretend victory as a kind of symbolic gesture. The documents of the PZPR leadership, then secret and now accessible, leave no doubt that the Warsaw Provincial Court had no leeway. Following exact directives from the Central Committee, the court of Judge Zdzisław Kościelniak declared on October 24 the conditional registration of the NSZZ Solidarity. The court unilaterally added to the bylaws assurances drawn from the Gdańsk Accord that the Union does not intend to play the role of a political party or undermine the system, especially the leadership role of the PZPR and "the established international alliances." The court also crossed out paragraphs 32 and 33 that regulated the procedures for declaring a strike, replacing them with a general statement that a strike is only possible "after exhausting all other available means."

I was at the reading of the court decision along with the entire KKP, and I have to admit with embarrassment that I initially wanted to laugh. Throwing in of all these magical spells to our bylaws was meaningless. No one wanted to rip out the power to rule the state from the Party or withdraw from the Warsaw Pact. The excerpt from the Gdańsk Accord was about the state and not about self-governing organizations. Moreover it did not subject the trade union to the "leadership role of the Party." But inserting these liturgical phrases into the Union bylaws was utterly illegal. The court could register us or not on the basis of its evaluation of our bylaws, but it could not alter them or write them for us.

Most of the Solidarity activists who came from their regions to hear the announcement were outraged by what they saw as a provocative disregard for the Union's independence and self-governance. I think this was the first time I saw so tangibly that symbolic aggression could be more effective in triggering conflict than real aggression. It is notable that among those most offended by the inclusion of the mantra of the Party's leadership role were the workers who were Party activists before August 1980 and still were members—such as the chair of the Wałbrzych MKS, Jerzy Szulc, and the chair of the Copper Basin MKS, Ryszard Sawicki. I knew them relatively well, so their reaction instantly caught my attention. It turned out that their reaction was similar to union activists who were Party members in other regions.

We met at the Warsaw KIK on the same day. The KKP advisors managed to redirect the anger of the activists into the relatively safe zone of verbal aggression. We adopted a fierce-sounding declaration: "The bylaws we submitted . . . were subjected to unlawful abuse in a manner unheard of in Polish jurisprudence, and without the consent of the Founding Committee." But we announced no stronger reaction than appealing the decision to the Supreme Court following regular procedure. The decision whether we should go on strike or not was left to the KKP meeting planned for October 27 in Gdańsk.

At this meeting it turned out that there were serious differences of opinions within the KKP. The representatives of the Gdańsk MKZ, essentially with the support of the Mazowsze region, pushed toward a confrontation by strike. They voted on a resolution that called for the prime minister to come the next day, October 28, to the BHP hall in the

Gdańsk Shipyard because of the conflict about the registration of Solidarity. They also suggested that all the Founding Committees be converted into Striking Committees—from the factory committees to the regional committees, all the way to the KKP. Following the Gdańsk representatives' motion, the KKP moved its meeting from its home in Gdańsk-Wrzeszcz to the Gdańsk Shipyard, and the entire board of the Gdańsk MKZ participated in the proceedings. This was an ultimatum for the government, and the very location of the proceedings exposed the top representation of the union to the direct control and pressure from the shipyard workers. The workers' democracy about which Jacek Kuroń and I had written in our "Open Letter" was turning into flesh in front of our very eyes. But this gave us not so much a sense of triumph as anxiety.

The idea to proceed under the eyes of the shipyard workers was probably a reaction to the emergence of a moderate wing within the KKP. The representatives of Szczecin led by Marian Jurczyk and especially the representatives of the Jastrzębie MKS were essentially against using the threat of strike in the registration conflict. No one sane could accuse Jurczyk of being the authorities' puppet. At that time he was genuinely moderate, and only later radicalized. The Jastrzębie MKZ chairman, Jarosław Sienkiewicz, was regarded (likely not without reason) as a Trojan horse within Solidarity. By moving the meeting to the shipyard, the radically inclined Gdańsk MKS board undoubtedly wanted to put Wałęsa against the wall. Wałęsa started to play the role of arbiter between different currents in the Union and gained a position increasingly more independent from his former colleagues. All of this undermined the Union's cohesiveness as it was going into a fight during which internal conflicts should be avoided. Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Jacek Kuroń, and I, who still exercised a great deal of influence upon the Gdańsk board radicals, tried to prevent a situation where the Union leadership would enter a fight while not united.

The one-day deadline given to the prime minister to appear before the KKP was so short and ultimatum-like that it seemed impossible to meet. Nevertheless, the next day instead of Prime Minister Pińkowski, his deputy and principal signatory of the agreement, Mieczysław Jagielski, appeared in Gdańsk.[28] Both sides started playing games. Jagielski did not come to the shipyard but invited representatives of the KKP to a preliminary discussion at the Voivodship Council. Wałęsa, who kept a clear mind amid the KKP quarrels, in a heated exchange forced them to send a delegation. The delegation returned shortly with the information that the prime minister had invited the KKP to negotiations at the Office of the Council of the Ministers in Warsaw on October 30. This triggered a fight among us that the government probably expected, or perhaps even wanted. The Gdańsk MKZ board decided that we had been treated arrogantly, that the government had pushed us into a defensive position, and that we must immediately respond with a countrywide strike. From then on we should lock ourselves in the factories, like in August, and convert the Union structures into Striking Committees. The extremity of these proposals strengthened the camp of the moderates who were against a strike, or even against declaring a strike. In this critical situation the disagreements within the KKP were growing dangerously.

I spoke, intending to move the discussion back on a more rational path. The minutes of that meeting do not survive, but I remember the structure of my argument. I pointed out that we were facing a trap. The fact that it was too far for Jagielski to go from the Gdańsk Voivodship Council building to the shipyard, and that the government proposed talks in their Warsaw headquarters instead of coming here, might have outraged some of the people in the room. But it certainly would not outrage the rest of the country. The millions of people upon whom our strength depended, as well as the success of the strike, would get the message that we had rejected an invitation to negotiate and call everybody to strike instead. On learning this, a good part of our supporters would make the cuckoo sign with their fingers instead of striking. We would go into the confrontation weakened and in a losing position. We should turn around the trap that they want to lure us into—we should accept the invitation to Warsaw and set the date of the strike in advance, in case the negotiations fail. Then the authorities would find themselves trapped. If the government says that it refuses to negotiate "at strike gunpoint," there would be a huge outcry because it would seem like it was bluffing with its offer to negotiate. In this case, if there was a confrontation, we would be the stronger side because we had the support of society. Conversely, our strong position would give us better chances to succeed if there were negotiations.

I think I managed at least partially to switch the discussion from a confrontation of emotions to a consideration of arguments. Heated discussions went on for a while, and eventually I was asked to present my argument again. It was backed by Tadeusz Mazowiecki, who proposed we use the milder phrase “countrywide strike alert” instead of strike. He also proposed declaring it for November 12, 1980, if by that time the conflict about the Union’s registration and bylaws had not found a satisfactory resolution. The KKP accepted this proposal, and Jacek Kuroń convinced the Gdańsk MKZ board to comply.

Our resolution stated that the entire KKP—a rather large body—would come to the negotiating table at the prime minister’s invitation. We had to decide in advance who would be responsible for what during the negotiations. Wałęsa, like a military commander, appointed Andrzej Gwiazda to lead the negotiations on the registration, Joanna Duda-Gwiazda to negotiate the implementation of the salary part in the Gdańsk Accord, and Andrzej Słowik from Łódź to negotiate the market supply (food coupons).[29] I was entrusted with negotiating the access of Solidarity to the media.

The negotiations in the Office of the Council of the Ministers took all day. The government was represented by Prime Minister Józef Pińkowski, Vice Prime Minister Mieczysław Jagielski, Minister of Justice Jerzy Bafia, and his deputy Zygmunt Rybicki, of whom I had unpleasant memories as the rector of Warsaw University during the March 1968 events.[30] But the mood of the negotiations was courteous and to the point. More importantly, we worked out some constructive solutions. In the matters for which I was responsible, the government agreed that we launch a high-circulation Union weekly with a countrywide reach. We also essentially agreed (that is, details were to be hammered out during later talks that did not take place in the end) that the Polish Radio and TV would air programs prepared by Solidarity. Regarding the most burning matter, that is, the controversy about the Union’s registration and bylaws, it was agreed that the Minister of Justice would compel the Supreme Court to hear our appeal of Judge Kościelniak’s decision by November 10. As for the salary part, the Union side demanded that the sums allocated for the pay increases be distributed so as to flatten the differences in salaries. This demand had appeared in many local and factory salary conflicts. This is notable because the demand was a clear and spontaneous expression of the egalitarianism that was characteristic of the first Solidarity.

In my opinion the positive climate of the negotiations was not a trick of our opponents but rather a result of their cultural patterns. During a break, I witnessed a conversation in the lobby between the head of the Rzeszów MKS Antoni Kopaczewski (a worker in the WSK transportation equipment factory) and Deputy Prime Minister Jagielski. Kopaczewski was tired after a night on the train, and he was talking very incoherently. I could not figure out his point, and Jagielski probably could not understand it either, but he was staring at Kopaczewski like a hypnotized bird at a snake. Kopaczewski was wearing green gabardine trousers (probably secondhand World War II fatigues) tucked into the tops of his boots, a checkered flannel shirt, and a rough jacket. He was smoking half a “Sport” cigarette in a glass *fifka*.[31] He was unshaven and was talking in a hoarse, demanding voice. To the deputy prime minister, Kopaczewski must have seemed like the incarnation of the proletariat, or maybe even the embodiment of the entire “working people of town and country” straight from the dead pages of the Constitution of communist Poland, entering the chambers of the Ministers’ Council Office to reclaim his rights.[32]

Yet the government did not publish the communiqué that we agreed upon with the positive results of the negotiations; they only publicly announced the date of the Supreme Court hearing. We published the entire communiqué in Union bulletins. But as the government did not publish it, the results of the negotiations were not binding on their side. Apparently the opinion prevailed in the KC Politburo or Secretariat that the climate of the negotiations was too conciliatory and the agreements went too far. Two days later, at the Secretariat meeting, Tadeusz Grabski said that “Comrades Barecki [the spokesman for the government] and Rybicki had given in to pressure from ‘Solidarity,’ and this prevented a proper communiqué.”

Nine months later, when after the negotiations with the government Solidarity did not sign a communiqué written by the advisors on both sides, Deputy Prime Minister M. F. Rakowski accused us of breaking the negotiations and launched a noisy media campaign. He had more imagination than we. On October 30, 1980, it did not occur to us that Pińkowski had broken the negotiations. We just thought the government was withdrawing from some of the agreed upon points, and based on this we inferred that the threat of confrontation was not over. We made the necessary preparations for the strike. On the other hand, the MSW started to prepare something like martial law, but the idea was at a very early stage, and it would have been an extremely risky improvisation.

On November 6 or 7 I was in Wrocław, and I was recalled to Warsaw again. On November 8 Tadeusz Mazowiecki and I went unofficially to the Sejm to talk with the representatives of the government about a compromise solution for the registration crisis. We talked to Tadeusz Grabski (then a Politburo member and the KC secretary responsible for contacts with trade unions, as well as a deputy prime minister); the government spokesman Józef Barecki; and Sylwester Zawadzki, who was about to become the Minister of Justice. Our talks were strictly confidential for a delicate reason—we were about to negotiate the Supreme Court ruling to be issued in two days.

Our negotiations went smoothly. I had never worked with a more conciliatory negotiator in the government camp than Tadeusz Grabski, even if because of his later alliances within the Party he went down in history as one of the most hardline representatives of the “concrete.”[33] We soon agreed that in exchange for the removal of the changes made in our bylaws by the provincial court, we would add an appendix with the content of the documents that were evoked at the very beginning of the original version of the bylaws before Judge Kościelniak altered them. They started with the statement that we were establishing independent self-governing trade unions on the legal basis of two conventions of the World Confederation of Labor on union freedom and the first point of the Gdańsk Accord. We decided to add the words “see appendix” in parentheses after the mention of these documents and in the appendix quote the full texts of both the WCL conventions and the first point of the Gdańsk Accord (with political declarations on the role of the Party in the state, communal property, socialism, and the alliances). On November 8, after the first round of negotiations with Grabski, I called Jacek Kuroń and conveyed to him the direction of the talks and asked him to convince Andrzej Gwiazda (the leader of the Gdańsk radicals) to join the negotiations with Grabski. Andrzej decided to come and participate in the November 9 morning and evening sessions. He negotiated like a firm but flexible pragmatist.

The meeting of the KKP that was held in the Warsaw home of the Catholic Intelligentsia Club on the afternoon of November 9 was confidential. But now it is well known, not only because the minutes survived and can be analyzed by historians but also due to the excellent article by Ewa Berberyusz “Załącznik” that at the time was published by *Tygodnik Powszechny*. Therefore I will mention two episodes regarding the negotiations that are largely unknown.

The first is mainly anecdotal. During a break in the KKP proceedings, Andrzej Gwiazda and I gave a confidential report in a separate room about the negotiations with Grabski’s team to the representatives from a few of the largest regions, more detailed than during the general proceedings. At this closed meeting, the Huta Katowice MKZ was represented by then chair Kazimierz Świtoń. After hearing our report, he realized what we had been talking about with Grabski, and he stammered in outrage, “This means you violated the independence of the Supreme Court!” It would be hard to simply deny this, and I preferred not to dwell on the subject. I looked at Świtoń with a piercing gaze and hissed, “Kazimierz, what exactly are you doing here? Go to prison, you should be locked up.”

Shortly before August, Świtoń had held a solitary hunger strike in a church in Katowice. The SB had dragged him out and beat him up, held him until the traces of the beating had disappeared, and then charged him with attacking the agents. The court in Katowice slapped him with a sentence of a year and a half in prison. The court did not suspend the sentence but did not order its implementation either. With a sentence hanging over him, Świtoń joined the board of the Silesian MKZ. Now he did not get my point.

“Why should I go to prison?”

“You have a pending sentence for beating up officers.”

“But the verdict was unfair!” retorted Świtoń.

That was precisely my point.

“Kazimierz, do you really think that Kościelniak’s decision was fair?” I asked him in an inquisitorial tone.

Świtoń went silent. Even today I feel rather embarrassed that I silenced him like this, because he was right. I comfort myself that it was for a good reason and was effective. The KKP voted for the appendix, I think unanimously. With this, we had weathered the storm.

At the same meeting, the KKP decided to create a post for spokesperson, and I was elected, I believe also unanimously.

Immediately after the end of the meeting, Mazowiecki, Gwiazda, and I got a message that, despite the late hour, we were summoned to the parliament for an additional meeting with Grabski's team. We went there with our hearts in our mouths.

"Gentlemen, I owe you an apology," Grabski started, "these lawyers must always throw in their three cents. You know, it is not like we can simply call them and tell them what we want. They said they won't scrap Kościelniak's changes, but they will invalidate the entire decision and call for a new registration on the basis of the bylaws you will present. Isn't this better for you?" he inquired anxiously.

"It certainly seems better for you—no need to publicly withdraw the leadership role of the Party from the document. It will just disappear together with the entire document," I retorted.

But it probably was better for us as well—first, because it was clearer from the legal perspective, and second, because it preserved our version of the regulations regarding strikes.

The next day the Supreme Court announced its ruling. The decision was in line with Grabski's declaration, and the justification was legally impeccable and written with the utmost elegance. The Solidarity activists who came to Warsaw for the November 9 KKP meeting and who were present in the courtroom responded to the ruling with applause. We went to the Nowotko Factory for a press conference during which we declared before state TV cameras that the dangerous social conflict that had been brewing over the past weeks had been averted. The KKP called off the warning strike that had been declared for November 12, and the Solidarity members were to resume their regular work. "The Brest-Litovsk treaty" was ratified.

It was a fragile peace, shaken by dangerous conflicts and constantly threatened with foreign intervention. Eventually, after thirteen months from the registration crisis, this strange truce was erased by martial law. The fact that it lasted for such a short time was not surprising, rather that it happened at all.

BETWEEN THE UNCONTROLLABLE AND THE “CONCRETE”

The fact that Solidarity remained an independent, or rather uncontrollable, movement until the end was not so much because of the valor of its leaders or the wisdom of its advisors but because of the attitudes of its proper creators and hosts—the people in every factory, school, or place where they had lived and worked for years who suddenly took on a new role to organize their coworkers and neighbors to strike and form a union. This was the time when Polish Joans of Arc (female or male) were born on the spot by the thousands to change everything around them, beginning with themselves. It was necessary to begin with themselves because until then these Joans of Arc lived, felt, and thought just like almost all other citizens of communist Poland. They lived on their own within their private circles, but they did not aspire to independence in public life. To the contrary, they were conformist. In elections they obediently voted for a single ballot without using the curtain in the booth, they attended May First parades waving to the comrades on the podium, they often belonged to the ZMS (the older ones to the ZMP), and they often were Party members. This ritual conformism was uncomfortable but passed as something normal. “Everybody does it, and even if there is sin in it, I will confess and get absolution.”

An unprecedented change occurred in the lives of these intimidated gray conformists during the August 1980 strikes, and even in a larger scale in September, when Solidarity cells were created in every factory in every corner of Poland. To join a strike or a union that was being permitted “at strike gunpoint” by the authorities was each individual’s autonomous decision. For the vast majority it was their first independent decision in public life. In addition, everyone realized that he or she was making this decision in defiance of the authorities. If you have never experienced such a thing, you can hardly understand the deep psychological breakthrough that accompanies the straightening up of a spine that has been bent for your entire life. This applies even more so to the decision to actively organize a strike or a union and draw others in. These people consciously crossed the Rubicon. They rejected their previous complacency, and the social life of their factory communities, Union, and country became the focus of their independent actions. This state of mind is called a revolution.

This is also a social mechanism that resists all attempts to be reined in.

I encountered this mechanism firsthand, when as a member of the Wrocław MKZ I attended founding meetings in several factories. The discussion was mainly about organizational matters which by nature are not too exciting. I was struck by the fervent passion with which the participants—founders of Solidarity cells in small factories, hospitals, or schools—approached procedural issues about how the meetings should be conducted. It took me some time to figure out that they were obsessively concerned with preventing any possibility of manipulation. The people who were manipulated throughout their lives now were creating their own organization, and above all they wanted to preserve its (that is, their own) independence. They created the first Solidarity, which they regarded as their own work, and they would not cede their creation even to Lech Wałęsa, the KK, or the provincial leaders. The idea that they would submit themselves to the leadership role of the Party was unthinkable. The hope of the Party "doves" that this could be achieved by political means (that is, without large-scale violence and again exposing society to fear) was just a pipe dream.

The Solidarity leaders enjoyed enormous authority, and they were adored by the crowds. I know this because I experienced this narcotic myself. However, this did not mean that our Joans of Arc were willing to hand over even a smidgen of their autonomy to their adored leaders. The active Solidarity members together with the millions of people who made the Union such a powerhouse would follow their beloved leaders into fire, but only if they understood and accepted their strategy. When a clear strategy was missing, or when the decisions agreed upon behind the scenes between the leaders and the authorities were incomprehensible and not accepted by all, the great ship of Solidarity lost its maneuverability. Neither Wałęsa nor the KKP nor the regional leaders were able to control what was going on in the Union and in the country. The leaders at the helm depended on the Union base, not through mechanisms such as a vote of no confidence but because "the rudder turned back." Facing a decision that was incomprehensible or not accepted, all the Joans of Arc at the bottom of the Union would start their own wars against the local authorities—a factory director, a county office, a voivode, or a province

Party secretary. Then a dangerous wave of local conflicts would swell, and the countrywide leadership would be able to pacify it only with great difficulty.

Such a wave swept Poland at the end of January 1981. The conflicts erupted in the former county capitals that Gierek's local administration reform had elevated to voivodships: Bielsko-Biała, Jelenia Góra, and Suwałki. The advancement to the rank of voivodship capital meant that the new institutions needed homes: the MO headquarters, the Party Voivodship Committee, the WRN, and the like. Appropriately prestigious buildings either were built from scratch or converted from other functions. And as always, there was not enough money for health care and education. In addition, the Jelenia Góra Valley and to a lesser extent the Silesian Beskids Mountains were attractive recreation areas where the Wrocław, Katowice, and even Warsaw nomenklatura comrades had built their summer houses or vacationed in fancy spas, whereas the locals lived in standard rural squalor, and if they fell ill, they could count on a bed in a corridor in an overcrowded and underinvested hospital. Now with Solidarity, ordinary people from Jelenia Góra or Bielsko also felt powerful, and their first desire was to bring justice to their own communities. More bluntly, this was the need for social revenge. They demanded exemplary punishment for corrupted kingpins, "issuing a request for payment" to voivodship dignitaries, and converting the MO headquarters and luxury retreats that until now only were only accessible to the "owners of the People's Republic of Poland" into health care facilities.

I had the opportunity to look closely at the strike in Jelenia Góra. The local activists started it when the KKP did not take the initiative. They demanded that the MSW sanatorium and the Party Central Committee's "Granit" retreat that outraged our colleagues with its luxurious swimming pool and copper gutters be used for medical purposes, and above all that Stanisław Ciosek be dismissed as Minister for the Trade Unions.[34] He previously had been the first secretary of the Jelenia Góra Party Committee, and the Jelenia Góra Solidarity activists wanted "to hold him accountable." This demand aggravated Wałęsa, not just because it extended beyond the regional scope and was the purview of the KKP but above all because Ciosek, a politician of uncommon intelligence and social sensitivity, was one of the most no-nonsense Solidarity negotiating partners during that stormy time. Moreover, the accusations against Ciosek of misusing power for personal gains were falling short one after another. Even the accusation that as Voivodship Committee first secretary he had ordered a custom tailored suit from a local clothing factory did not stick—it turned out that he had paid for it, and anyone who saw him knew that ready-made clothes would not contain his large body frame.

In a critical moment of the strike, Wałęsa came to the "Gencjana" chemical factory in Jelenia Góra that was home to the Striking Committee. I was there along with activists from the other Lower Silesian towns. We tried to convince the organizers to stop the strike. Our discussion with the Striking Committee was of course broadcast on the factory radio. During a break in negotiations, I went to the factory canteen with Jerzy Szulc and Ryszard Sawicki. We had to pass a gate that was guarded not by workers with armbands but by a guardswoman from the Industry Guard (a state paramilitary organization). The guard was a slight young woman. She looked pitiful and disarming in a cap that was too large for her, and she had a disproportionately large holster. She stood with her hands at her sides and she was crying. I asked her what was wrong, and she said, "What is Wałęsa talking about? Does he want us to forgive this sonovabitch?" To her, Ciosek was unquestionably guilty. Justice in Jelenia Góra, Suwałki, or Bielsko-Biała required that the people felt the throats of the Voivodship first secretaries under their work-worn hands.

The first Solidarity had its own hierarchy of values. It was neither developed at Union-organized courses with the opposition intelligentsia as teachers nor borrowed from prominent intellectuals who advised Wałęsa and the Countrywide Commission. Rather, it held innate values, or at least ones evident to the generation of thirtysomethings who grew up in Catholic families and were decently educated in communist Poland. Communist Poland proclaimed equality and social justice, and it described the working class in newspaper leads as the avant-garde of society. When this avant-garde went on strike and started to talk with its own voice, it did not renounce the old slogans but demanded their implementation.

This especially applied to equality. Point eight on the list of demands of the Inter-Factory Striking Committee in Gdańsk concerned pay increases to compensate for high prices. These increases were to be in an equal amount for everybody, or even bigger for those who earned less, in order to flatten pay inequities. The government was against leveling incomes as “counter-motiving,” and the final formula adopted in the Gdańsk Accord was ambiguous, or even self-contradictory. This caused many conflicts and strikes at the implementation of point eight. Public transportation in Wrocław went into an uproar when the pay increases were announced because bus drivers were to receive the biggest increases, whereas shop workers and cleaners received the smallest. The bus and tram drivers worked many hours day in and day out, but they earned a lot. Władysław Frasyniuk, who until August 1980 drove an E line bus, showed me his pay slip for July: 16,000 zlotys (as an adjunct professor with a habilitation, I was making 4,700 zlotys a month).[35] But in the Wrocław public transportation authority in September 1980, it was not the technicians or cleaners who threatened to strike but the bus drivers who had the highest earnings and were to receive the highest raises. They regarded this inequality as unjust, and they were ready to halt public transportation against their own interests on behalf of those who were worse off.

Such altruism is not an everyday matter. It occurs in special circumstances—in a festive mood shared by everybody when celebratory patterns of group behavior come to the fore. We may not follow these patterns in everyday life, but we instinctively reach for them at special times, and the 1980–1981 solidarity-driven revolution was a special time. The great Solidarity was a deeply egalitarian and collectivist movement in which equality and community were highly valued. Without understanding these values, the unique phenomenon of the so-called solidarity strike cannot be understood. This term does not apply to the August strike, when “all factory workers” united in their struggle for shared demands, as the banner at the Second Gate to the Gdańsk Shipyard read. This is the case of strikes declared by stronger groups of workers on behalf of weaker groups, or groups that for different reasons could not stop work to press for the implementation of their demands. A classic example is the SKM (rapid transit) strike in Gdańsk. It was declared to support the pay demands of health care workers. At that time a strike of nurses or doctors was inconceivable for moral reasons. They were considered providers of a social service of the utmost importance, and therefore they could not leave their patients. If nurses, lab workers, or doctors were hurting, someone else had to step in to defend their salaries. I do not remember if it was the KKP or the Gdańsk MKZ who called for the Gdańsk commuter train engineers and bus drivers to strike for pay increases for nurses, but the call was received with complete understanding, even if the strikers themselves would not profit from the strike.

Community was regarded as one of the most important values. But loyalty to that community, although a virtue in itself, had an unsettling flip side. Solidarity had emerged from a fight and remained under threat. The awareness that we faced a powerful and essentially monolithic enemy was widespread. We had our squabbles, but the allegation of undermining our unity was almost tantamount to accusing someone of being an agent-provocateur of the enemy. In Wrocław, Leszek Słonka was a pre-August 1980 ROPCiO activist. Initially he wanted to be active in the Union regional authorities. When he did not succeed, he established a separate group and published the bulletin *Wolny Związkowiec* (*The Free Unionist*) printed on a duplicator, in which he rather aggressively attacked Solidarity and the KOR members allegedly embedded in it. The tone of these accusations resembled the most virulent hardline Party propaganda, and the Lower Silesian Solidarity considered Słonka an enemy, or perhaps even an SB agent. Once at a general meeting of the heads of the Wrocław region Founding Committees (we periodically held these rally-like assemblies to keep in touch with the Union activists) one of Słonka's followers started to speak. As soon as he began to repeat the accusations from *Wolny Związkowiec*, there was an uproar. A wave of aggression mounted instantly. A few people rose and moved toward the black sheep. I felt my hair standing on end as it started to feel like a lynching. I grabbed a mic and somehow managed to calm the crowd. This was *my* crowd. I had a certain authority among them and I felt my place was in this community, but I saw the dangerous side of this collective in a flash.

Egalitarianism and collectivism are not among the foundational virtues of liberal capitalism. At that time only a staunch enemy could claim that we were hostile to socialism and aiming to restore a capitalist system. The editors of *Jedność*, a large-circulation weekly from the Szczecin Solidarity published officially from the first quarter of 1981 to the introduction of martial law, disputed such accusations many times. When the main Party daily, *Trybuna Ludu*, wrote about the antisocialist forces within Solidarity, our Szczecin colleagues responded, “It is not us, but you who are an antisocialist force, because you have turned against the working class.”[36] This shows that the word “socialism” meant something positive to the editors of *Jednośćć*, while the term “enemy of socialism” was offensive. The word “socialism” and its emotional rhetoric were avoided by the Warsaw *Tygodnik Solidarność*, where the language from intellectual circles predominated, but this did not mean that its editor-in-chief, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, would be willing to accept the label of enemy of socialism without protest.[37] It was only martial law and the underground that changed Solidarity’s rhetoric. Martial law did not just change the vocabulary but the entire character of the movement. The first Solidarity was egalitarian, collectivist, and socialist in spirit, at least in the sense that it accepted the state ownership of companies and expected that the state would provide for the basic needs of society. Our uncensored duplicator-printed bulletins published demands that were very far from realistic, and at our 1981 rallies almost nobody held back what they thought. Andrzej Rozpłochowski of Huta Katowice thundered at a KKP meeting, “We will bang our fists on the table, and then the Kremlin bells will toll the Polish anthem!” But there were no demands for the reprivatization of factories and estates confiscated after the war from industrialists and landowners. Such demands were outside of Solidarity’s mental horizon. We were after social justice, not for repaying the losses suffered by the capitalists after 1945 at the expense of society. We also wanted the state to secure a just provision for the basic needs of its citizens. For instance, the introduction of food stamps was the implementation of point 12 of the Gdańsk August 1980 demands.

The term “counter-revolution” was used by Brezhnev and his Kremlin collaborators, as well as their minions within the ranks of the PZPR. In the communists’ political jargon it served as a bugle call to attack. A counter-revolution was a mortal enemy with whom you do not negotiate but rather crush. In December 1980, and again in March 1981, the Kremlin politicians and the Polish “concrete” thus labeled the entire Solidarity. They treated it as a mortal enemy, without distinguishing between the “antisocialist extremists” who needed to be eliminated and the “healthy core,” control over which needed to be restored. This distinction was usually applied by Kania’s group. The difference in terms reflected a certain difference in attitudes toward the independent union, but this difference was unclear and not consistent. The same Stanisław Kania, at the March 20, 1981, meeting of the KC Secretariat (that is, a narrow circle), declared that “‘Solidarity’ is the organized army of all the Polish reactionary forces.” These words did not reach the public or even the broad apparatus of power. This conviction that the Party must regain ground lost in the August accords, widespread in the circles of power, prompted acts of police-prosecutorial aggression aimed directly against Solidarity. This led to dangerous conflicts because in its self-defense the Union reached for the weapon of strike.

The first such conflict erupted on November 10, 1980, on the very happy day of the registration of Solidarity by the Supreme Court. Disregarding the Court’s ruling, the administration in Częstochowa closed the Solidarity offices and prohibited it from printing its publications. The Union responded with a strike alert in the region. On November 19 the conflict ended with an agreement, and the overzealous local officials were removed from their positions.

But the very next day a much more dangerous conflict broke out in the Mazowsze region. General Prosecutor Lucjan Czubiński issued secret guidelines for his underlings detailing “the rules for persecuting the participants in illegal antisocialist activities.” These guidelines portrayed Solidarity as a product of the earlier activities of the opponents of the system. The author of this text particularly honored Jacek Kuroń and me by pointing out that we already had proposed the creation of “trade unions independent from the Party and state endowed with the right to political and economic strikes” in our 1965 “Open Letter.” The idea that free trade unions and the right to strike were unknown in the world before 1965, and that Polish workers had to read the Paris *Kultura* in order to learn about them, would be just a curiosity if it was not used to politically delegitimize a union that just had been legalized. A staff member in the prosecutor’s office, Piotr Sapełło, passed this secret document to the Mazowsze MKZ, who correctly recognized it as being directed at the very existence of Solidarity and decided to publicize the prosecutor's plans by printing it.[38]

On November 20 prosecutor Wiesława Bardonowa, accompanied by SB agents, entered and searched the Mazowsze region office.[39] The next day Jan Narożniak, who had printed Czubiński's missive in the region's printing shop, was arrested and charged with making public a classified document.[40] Piotr Sapełło was arrested as well. In a declaration published the same day, the MKZ Presidium pointed out the fact that the prosecutor's document was evidence that the law enforcement organs were disregarding the Gdańsk Accord. The Presidium declared a strike alert for the region and demanded the release of the two activists. It also demanded an explanation regarding Czubiński's role in the 1976 antiworker repressions. The next morning the Ursus tractor factory went on strike. The list of demands was expanded to include the creation of a parliamentary commission to investigate, together with Solidarity, the legality of the actions by the prosecutor's office, the MO, and the SB and to present "measures to protect citizens against abuses by these organs." Other demands concerned revealing the identities of the people responsible for the crimes committed against workers on the coast in December 1970, and against workers in Ursus and Radom in June 1976, and finally the release of arrested KPN activists Leszek Moczulski and his codefendants. Over the next few days, the Róża Luksemburg factory, the Nowotko mechanical plant, and the Huta Warszawa joined the strike.[41] On November 26 the KKP backed Mazowsze, especially emphasizing the demand to release Narożniak and Sapełło, and it passed Czubiński's secret document to all MKZs with the suggestion that it should become public (that is, encouraging its printing countrywide, which in fact happened). The KKP called all regional Solidarity cells to undertake solidarity actions.

Over just a few days, the prosecutor general's overzealous guidelines triggered a growing wave of protests and an escalation of demands causing panic among the Party leadership but at the same time seriously concerning the Solidarity leadership and advisors. Jan Olszewski argued to the leading activists of the Mazowsze region that the demand to make those responsible for the December 1970 massacre accountable would lead to a conflict with the top command of the army. Jacek Kuroń thought that the demands aimed at the MSW, even if justified, were unacceptable to the government because in their eyes giving in to them would be tantamount to disarming the authorities. The demand to release the arrested KPN leaders had been previously raised by Solidarity, but the Union had not threatened with a strike out of concern that the KPN had no base in the factories, therefore the strike in defense of the KPN might not have enough support. Eventually the pragmatically oriented activists and advisors of the MKZ Mazowsze managed to limit the demands in such a way that the release of Narożniak and Sapełło was a precondition for ending the strike, and the other demands were to be the subject of further negotiations with the government. The Chair of the Polish Journalists' Association, Stefan Bratkowski, offered to mediate (he had contacts on both sides of the conflict) and granted assurances to the court on behalf of the association. Then together with the two released activists he arrived triumphantly in Ursus.[42] This made it possible to halt the strike. But the Huta Warszawa workers refused to return to work, calling for the other demands to be met. This created a dangerous situation (internally for the Union as well).

On November 27, 1980, the activists and advisors of the Solidarity countrywide leadership arrived at the Huta Warszawa—Wałęsa, Kuroń, Mazowiecki, and Geremek. I was there too, not as a representative of Wrocław but as the KKP spokesman. The delegates of the Huta's striking sections gathered in a large meeting hall, equivalent to the Gdańsk Shipyard BHP hall. We argued all night that, because Narożniak and Sapełło had been released, they should stop their strike and leave the other demands to the negotiations between the Solidarity leadership and the government. The delegates were adamant that the strike needed to be continued until Czubiński and the people responsible for the pacifications of the 1970 and 1976 workers' protests were made accountable and the KPN activists released. I particularly remember a woman in overalls who addressed the delegates, "Comrades, my father—an old Party activist—taught me, 'Daughter, think twice before you start to do something. But when you decide to do it, see it through.'" The other delegates also addressed each other as "comrade." This was rather unusual at that time. It was clear that a majority of the unbending strike activists of the Huta

Warszawa Solidarity were Party members and treated their Party affiliation naturally. If this could have been seen and heard by the Politburo members who counted on taking over the Union, they would not have been pleased. In this case, the Party members were taken by Solidarity and not the other way around. I called the government spokesman Józef Barecki several times that night. At some point he passed the receiver to Zbigniew Regucki, who was in the Central Committee in charge of the Secretariat's office and was close to Kania. Regucki told me that in light of the strike continuation, despite the release of Narożniak and Sapełło, that is, in spite of the "gentleman's agreement" mediated by Bratkowski, the last remnants of faith in our good will were melting on "their side." He should have told this to the Party workers in Huta Warszawa, whom we finally managed to convince to compromise in the early hours of the morning. Once more we had the sense of riding out a storm. How many times can one ride out a storm?

A THREAT HANGS OVER POLAND

Moscow could not accept that the new state of affairs in Poland would actually become permanent. It influenced the course of events in the satellite country by playing up the power struggle within the Polish Party. It also exerted open pressure onto the ruling class and threatened to impose economic sanctions by severely limiting the supply of cheap oil and gas. Finally, it raised the possibility of military intervention. These were not empty threats. The invasion of the Soviet Army and the occupation of a country with the establishment of a puppet government was completely possible, as in Hungary in 1956 or Czechoslovakia in 1968. From November 1980 on, the Kremlin demanded more and more aggressively that Poland's authorities should introduce martial law. Even if Kania and Jaruzelski truly wanted to introduce the reforms necessary for a lasting coexistence of authoritarian power and independent trade unions, they would not have enough political power to break through the resistance of the domestic "concrete" and the opposition of the Kremlin. I think they neither wanted to nor could do it. The situation gave them no chance; things had to end up more or less the way they did. However, at that time, I was not inclined toward such a fatalist conclusion. Moreover, as a Union activist I thought I had no right to such fatalism.

The specter of an invasion constantly hung over our heads during the sixteen months of the Solidarity revolution, but it really hit us at the beginning of December 1980. The threat of a strike in the Mazowsze region was temporarily removed, and both sides breathed a sigh of relief. There was no kindling of new conflicts smoldering on the horizon, and there were no strikes in the country. But the calm in Poland was not welcome in Moscow. From the Kremlin's point of view, the current situation was impossible to tolerate. The fact that the capitulators in Warsaw again had bought peace at the price of new surrenders to the counter-revolution irritated the Soviet leadership immensely. It is possible that Brezhnev's clique reached the conclusion that there was no point in relying on Kania's group and that they must enforce a solution on their own initiative and with their military. A meeting of the heads of states of the Warsaw Treaty countries was called for December 5 and 6 in Moscow. On the first day, the participants discussed the situation in Poland without the Polish side present. The Central Command of the Polish Army was informed that fourteen divisions of the Soviet Army, two Czechoslovak divisions, and two East German divisions would enter Poland on the night of December 8 to 9 to hold maneuvers code named "Soyuz-80." There was a map attached to this information with the locations and directions of the movements of the allied armies marked with arrows. The units were to surround Poland's large cities and industrial centers. This was not a design for a war game, and the number of troops that were to participate was also not consistent with any training purposes. The units entering Poland had war-level personnel with their own field hospitals, kitchens, and all supplies. Only one division of East Germany's National People's Army was to participate with training-appropriate personnel, that is, reduced to officers and core NCOs.

The CIA had a valuable spy in the Polish General Staff, Colonel Ryszard Kukliński.[43] He immediately informed his contacts about the details of the Moscow plan to bring troops to Poland under the guise of the "Soyuz-80" maneuvers. The American intelligence service recognized it as an invasion plan, and President Carter's National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski had no difficulty in eliciting a reaction from the president. Carter and Brezhnev held a phone conversation on the so-called hotline on December 3, 1980. Carter pointed out the fact that moving such a large Soviet contingent several hundred kilometers westward would impact the balance of power in Europe, and the American side would have to restore it. At that time the American response to the Soviet advantage in conventional arms was medium-range self-guided ballistic missiles stationed in Europe. The Soviet side apparently saw the American warning as a hint about the increase in numbers of missiles. The Kremlin was afraid of this because a new stage in the arms race in this area would be very hard on the Soviet economy. Possibly because of this, the planned maneuvers in Poland were canceled. On December 5 Brezhnev met Kania in Moscow, and in response to assurances by the latter that the Polish authorities would move more energetically to fight the "counter-revolution," he declared, "OK, we will not enter Poland. But if things get more complicated, then we will. But we won't enter without you [that is, without working it out with you]." The order for the Warsaw Pact armies to cross the Polish borders (for December 8) was revoked.

Historians debate Moscow's intentions in bringing these eighteen divisions to Poland. The absence of documents describing the political goals of the invasion prompts some scholars to speculate that this was simply a means to pressure Warsaw to introduce martial law and that Brezhnev was bluffing in order to scare Kania. There is no written proof that the Kremlin had decided to restore order in Poland with Soviet troops.

I am also a historian, although a medievalist. In my particular discipline we have far fewer sources than historians who deal with the twentieth century. I hope I will be forgiven for referring to the ironic maxim by the great Polish medievalist Karol Buczek who ridiculed scholars who stick too closely to incomplete source materials, *Quod non est in scripto, non est in mundo* ("What is not written does not exist"). Yet there is no Soviet Party Politburo or Secretariat resolution preserved in the Soviet archives that ordered the troops to enter Afghanistan. I do not think that somebody destroyed or hid it. I rather think that simply there was no such resolution, and the decision on the attack was made in an informal yet decisive circle that did not follow established procedures and did not record their proceedings. Hence there is no written resolution, but it seems risky to conclude that there was no Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

In November 1997 I participated in an international conference on the internal and international aspects of the 1980–1982 Polish crisis organized by the Institute of Political Science, Polish Academy of Science and held in Jachranka near Warsaw.[44] Along with historians of that period (I was not one of them), participants of the events discussed also took part. The American side was represented by Zbigniew Brzezinski, Richard Pipes, Jan Nowak-Jeziorański, and General William Odom, who at the beginning of the 1980s was the head of the US military intelligence.[45] Stanisław Kania, Generals Wojciech Jaruzelski and Florian Siwicki, Deputy Prime Minister Mieczysław F. Rakowski, and Stanisław Ciosek represented Poland's communist government and the Party.[46] The Solidarity side had a very weak representation in Jachranka. At the same time, Jerzy Buzek was forming the government, and the active participants of political life from "our" camp did not come to the conference, or only showed up briefly.[47] So Zbigniew Bujak and I sat there alone, as we were already political outsiders. On the other hand, the Russian delegation was remarkable: Marshal Victor Kulikov, who was the former commander-in-chief of the United Armed Forces of the Warsaw Pact; his chief of staff General Anatoly Gribkov; and the former employee of the CPSU Foreign Department, Georgy Shakhnazarov.[48] Of course to the professional historians of these events, we were not partners but living sources. Probing these sources was the most thrilling, even if not the easiest aspect of the conference. The proceedings were secret, and the press knew nothing about them. There were no journalists in the audience, but even that was not enough to make the actors of the old drama tell the truth. Andrzej Paczkowski, the principal organizer and author of the conference's success, confessed to me in the lobby with genuine envy, "Lucky you, your sources are long dead!"

In Jachranka, the Soviet Army "sources" were particularly problematic. Both Marshal Kulikov and General Gribkov had a tremendous sense of the continuity of the empire and cared about the reputation of the Soviet Union as if it had not been dissolved. They emphasized with great certainty that the thought of intervention in brotherly Poland had never dawned on either the leaders of the Soviet state or the Soviet Army commanders. At the beginning of the conference, Gribkov assured the participants that he guaranteed the truth of his words with the word of honor from an old soldier who started his war service in 1939. The room went very quiet. He heard this and realized that his words about beginning his war service in 1939 might not sound quite right in this particular country, so he hastily added, “Of course in the Finnish theater.”[49] But the milk was already spilled. We smelled this milk again when Marshal Kulikov maintained—contrary to the claims by Brzezinski who was in the room—that the USSR had planned standard military exercises in Poland in December 1980 and not an invasion. To the comment by one of the participants about the map that had been passed to the Polish general staff with the routes of the allied divisions and the plan to surround the principal Polish cities, Kulikov protested, “Eto zhe nye plan, eto tol’ko namyotka plana” (“It was not a plan, just a draft for a plan”). We were not able to figure out this subtle difference.

The forces that were supposed to enter Poland seemed too large for military exercises but perhaps not sufficient enough for a full-fledged invasion in which civilian resistance had to be taken into account, along with the possibility of resistance by some Polish Army units. In 1968 twenty-four divisions were sent to Czechoslovakia, a smaller country than Poland. It was possible that the December 1980 Soviet plan was to force the Polish government into declaring martial law, or rather to change the governing group to one that would introduce martial law with the armed assistance of the intervening forces. Yet there is no reason to see this as anything but an armed invasion, especially that the population of the besieged towns would naturally treat the foreign soldiers as invaders and occupiers.

Luckily this did not happen. We were saved by Washington’s response and the fact that the Soviet Union was hopelessly entangled in Afghanistan. Yet Moscow felt seriously threatened by the events in Poland. In my opinion the Soviets were concerned not so much with the possibility of Poland leaving the Warsaw Pact as with setting an example for others. At that time I did not appreciate the threat we posed to the empire’s internal stability. I only realized this in October 1989 when I went on a short but instructive trip to the Soviet Union. This was my first visit in thirty years.

First I went to Kiev, then to Moscow, and then to Naberezhnye Chelny in Tatarstan where my half-brother lived. It was a town of half a million inhabitants built during Brezhnev's era as a bedroom community for a large Kamaz truck factory. This was during perestroika, and there was a political club in Naberezhnye Chelny named after Bukharin. My brother took me to its head, Valerii Pisigin. Pisigin proudly opened a desk drawer and took out a thick cardboard folder filled with 1980–1981 Soviet newspaper clippings. These were articles from *Pravda*, *Izvestia*, and *Krasnaya Zvezda* (the Soviet equivalent of *Żołnierz Wolności*) all slinging mud at Polish Solidarity.[50] Pisigin, then a worker in the Kamaz factory, had carefully clipped and saved anti-Polish diatribes, underlining fragments that he thought important. I looked at his underlining and realized that to a young worker who was outside the reach of Radio Svoboda and the Russian-language BBC, which were effectively scrambled, the official Soviet press was the only source for subversive information about Poland's Solidarity revolution. Like all Soviets, Pisigin knew how to read between the lines, and he was able to extract and put together some shreds of truth, even from *Pravda*. What he had read and interpreted from the propaganda attacks against Solidarity became a handbook of subversive activities. Moreover, the official Soviet press convinced him that subversive activities made sense and had a chance for success in that system. If something like this was possible in Poland, if an independent social movement could emerge in a communist country, and if it had been active there for more than a year, then perhaps something similar could be possible in the USSR as well. It is well worth examining this example. It was only while looking at these clippings in Pisigin's apartment that I realized we had poured deadly venom into the heart of the empire with our very existence—not with pompous declarations or even with the scandalous "Message to the Workers of Eastern Europe."[51] No wonder Brezhnev was anxious. He had good reasons for urging the Polish Party leaders to suppress the hydra of Solidarity by force as soon as possible.

The long shadow of the Soviet Army again fell onto the Polish political scene in March 1981, just prior to the greatest power challenge between the then legal Solidarity and the state authorities.

On March 7 a special meeting of the KKP was held in Warsaw. The most important topic was a new investigation against Jacek Kuroń and Adam Michnik. Kuroń was an official advisor to the countrywide Solidarity authorities, and Michnik was an advisor to the Mazowsze Inter-Factory Committee. The investigation regarding their KOR activities had been going on for a while, but now another accusation was added about their statements made in different cities and companies within the framework of the Solidarity educational network. Kuroń and Michnik were not arrested but instead ordered to periodically report to a police station. This was the first time when something said at Union meetings and training sessions had become the subject of an investigation. This was new, and if we did not respond, it would mean that Solidarity was silently accepting the penalization of its statutory activities.

Immediately before the KKP meeting, Deputy Prime Minister Mieczysław F. Rakowski had a long talk with the KKP secretary Andrzej Celiński and the chair of the Mazowsze MKZ Zbigniew Bujak.[52] Rakowski told them that a few days before in Moscow, Brezhnev and his closest associates had unceremoniously admonished Stanisław Kania and the new Polish prime minister Wojciech Jaruzelski. The Russians demanded that the Polish authorities carry out severe repressions against the “enemies of socialism” and threatened them with the worst consequences for Poland if their demand was not met. Rakowski tried to find out what the Union’s reaction would be to the imprisonment of KOR members. When Celiński mentioned a strike, Rakowski pretended to be surprised: “Would you risk a confrontation for twenty KOR members?” Celiński and Bujak related this at the KKP meeting. They did not reveal whom they had been talking to, and they requested absolute confidentiality for their report, as it was a state secret related to the Soviet threats and Poland’s security. For this reason the meeting was held behind closed doors, and no Solidarity press was admitted except for “Agencja Solidarności,” whose report was to be approved before printing by the KKP spokesman (that is, me).

Within the next few days Wałęsa was to have a meeting with Jaruzelski, and Wałęsa was very anxious that the demand to withdraw the charges against Kuroń and Michnik would not dominate the tenor of his talks with the new prime minister. I insisted on standing up in their defense and emphasized that in fact the issue was the Union's clear declaration that it would defend itself against being persecuted for its legal activities. Wałęsa reacted with open anger, "Don't push Jacek on me!" Already by then Wałęsa's close circle resembled a royal court full of intrigue and whispers. The Union chairman apparently let himself be talked into a ridiculous suspicion that Kuroń wanted to deprive him of his leadership and grab the post of Solidarity chairman for himself or place Bujak in this role. Moreover, Wałęsa was listening to the advisors who wanted to smooth everything out in the name of collaboration with the government. The most conciliatory of these advisors, Władysław Siła-Nowicki, used radical rhetoric toward that end. At the March 7 KPP meeting he emphasized that it was strange to concentrate on additional charges pressed by the prosecutors against two KOR members who were still at large, while the KPN leaders were in jail. Therefore we should either protest for everybody or issue a brief demand to end all political repressions without naming names. This was an effective argument. As a matter of fact, Solidarity had good reason to feel uneasy about Moczulski and the people accused with him. Andrzej Rozpłochowski, known for his radical declarations, picked up on Siła-Nowicki's argument. I stood by my proposal but lost the vote. A general and conciliatory resolution was voted on disguised as radical phraseology. Unfortunately it ill served the reconciliation between the government and the Union. As soon as the Union lowered its guard, the blow struck. But it was not a blow directed at Kuroń, Michnik, or other KOR members but directly at the local Union activists, or rather at the bridge between them and the emerging trade union for individual farmers.[53]

The demand to register the farmers' Solidarity loomed large in the minds of the CPSU and PZPR leaders. In this case their anxiety was irrational. It was based on ideological obsessions and not real danger. The comrades believed in the worker-peasant alliance and were scared to death that this alliance under the flag of Solidarity would put them against the wall. Kania's statements from meetings of top Party leaders demonstrate that he treated the refusal to register the farmers' Solidarity like the defense of the trenches of Holy Trinity Castle.[54]

In reality, the independent farmers' movement was much weaker than the workers' Solidarity, and it resorted to desperate gestures. On March 16, 1981, the farmers' union activists occupied the United People's Party (ZSL) building in Bydgoszcz. On the same day, the Warsaw Pact's "Soyuz-81" military maneuvers commenced in Poland. The coincidence of these events was accidental, but the presence of Soviet troops in Poland might prompt Poland's communist authorities to show more resolution toward the "audacious" actions of the peasant activists and their sponsors from the workers' Solidarity. This was especially so because Kania and Jaruzelski had listened again to Moscow's complaints about their "softness" at the meeting with Marshal Kulikov at the launch of military exercises. In the Party Politburo the decision to forcibly remove the farmers occupying the ZSL Provincial Committee building in Bydgoszcz was then discussed, but the attitude of the allied party that owned the building turned out to be an obstacle. The chair of the Bydgoszcz ZSL refused to call in the militia. But then something else happened that demonstrated the authorities' resolve to the Bydgoszcz Solidarity. On March 19 the head of the Bydgoszcz MKZ, Jan Rulewski, and a sizable group of regional activists came to the meeting of the WRN to present the farmers' demands and appeal for their support. The highest authorities of the People's Poland interpreted this as a plan to occupy the WRN building. They interrupted the session and ordered the militia to remove the representatives of Solidarity from the building. Despite the attitude of some of the councilors who demanded that the regional activists participate in the discussion, the Solidarity delegation was forcibly removed, and Rulewski, Mariusz Łabętowicz (a member of the MKZ board), and Michał Bartoszcze (a farmers' representative) were beaten severely.

We decided that this event was not an abuse of the police force by the people in power but a provocation by the MSW hardliners against Jaruzelski's new government. I agreed with this, even if I did not share the widespread love in Poland for the green uniform and epaulettes. In light of the minutes of the Party leadership meetings that are now accessible, I have to admit my mistake. At a Politburo meeting on March 24, 1981, that is, during the dangerous conflict triggered by the militia in Bydgoszcz, Kania admitted that this action took place "not without our knowledge." At the same meeting Kazimierz Barcikowski added that the MKZ activists "were to be removed from the room, but not beaten.” If the Politburo had to be informed about this after the fact, this meant it did not make the decision. In Andrzej Friszke’s *Rewolucja “Solidarności*, ” he drew the correct conclusion from the quoted minutes: “The removal of the ‘Solidarity’ activists from the building of the Provincial Council was approved by the people who belonged to the Party leadership, but the approval was not given at a formal meeting.” Such was the routine yet informal mode of making especially urgently important decisions in the communist dictatorship.

On March 18, I happened to be in the KKP offices in Gdańsk, in what was pompously called Wałęsa’s private office. Three of us were present—Wałęsa, Andrzej Celiński, and myself—when we received a telephone call from the government minister responsible for trade unions, Stanisław Ciosek. The phone had a speaker, and Andrzej and I could hear what the minister was saying to the Solidarity chairman. Ciosek was usually very composed and calm, but this time he was clearly agitated. Ciosek was talking as if he wanted to convey more than he could openly. “Mr. Chairman, Jan Rulewski and a group of Union activists are at this moment in the Provincial Council building in Bydgoszcz. Please call him immediately and try to convince him to leave the building. Believe me, this is extremely important and very urgent.” I cannot completely vouch for the accuracy of this quotation, but I am certain this was the sense of his warning. Wałęsa treated it very seriously. He called Rulewski and tried hard to talk him into leaving the building. Alas, to no avail. From Ciosek’s warning it is clear that he knew about the decision to remove the activists from the council and had more imagination than the people who had made the decision. Ciosek understood that a militia trooper armed with a baton might give in to momentary emotions and that things could spiral out of control. The political outcome could be very dangerous, and he was trying to prevent it. It was not possible for him to warn Wałęsa on his own initiative. He had to have permission, or rather a directive, from his supervisors—Prime Minister Jaruzelski, or at least Deputy Prime Minister Rakowski. It seems they also knew about the decision to use force and realized the danger involved. But comparing my knowledge from that time with the Politburo minutes now made public, I must put to rest my conviction that this was a police provocation against the government. Of course the beating of the activists was not planned in advance by the top decision makers, but they were the ones who resolved to use force. The beatings were a great shock to the society, which put the authorities on the losing side in the upcoming conflict from the start. Were this a deliberate provocation by those who had executed it, they would have had to consciously sabotage their supervisors' strategy and play to the advantage of the opponents, which was to our advantage. But such an assumption would cross the line dividing common sense from paranoia.

The extreme outrage throughout the country about the beatings of the Bydgoszcz Solidarity leaders determined the tenor of the KKP proceedings on March 24 and 25. Tempers were close to boiling, and people were distrustful toward Wałęsa and the advisors who were suspected of a conciliatory attitude toward the government and the inclination to manipulate the delegates. The majority pushed to immediately declare a general strike. Kuroń and I, and above all Wałęsa, suggested that we begin with a warning strike and that we set the date for the general strike. The general strike would start (or not) depending on the results of the negotiations with the government. This scenario was rejected at the initial vote. But Wałęsa broke the resistance of the outraged activists by leaving the room with the words, "If this is the case, you can play without me." Fortunately the KKP gave in to his blackmail about the strike timetable and changed its own resolution. However, it adopted a condition proposed by Kuroń that only the KKP would be entitled to evaluate the results of the negotiations and, depending on the outcome, possibly revoke the general strike. The backtracking on this condition became the direct cause of a truly powerful earthquake at the KKP "debriefing" meeting on March 31 and April 1, 1981.

But the general mood in the society was more important than our meetings and debriefings and found a spectacular expression in the warning strike. The impact of this strike was crucial to the behavior of the Polish political authorities and indirectly to the Soviet authorities as well. Of course, comparing a four-hour-long warning strike declared by a legal union to an indefinite and unauthorized strike from the previous August is not too meaningful. Yet I have no doubt that the governmental services counted whatever they were told to count. At the end of August 1980 about eight hundred thousand people were on strike throughout Poland.

On March 27, 1981, between 8:00 a.m. and noon, literally everybody in Poland stopped working. I was in Wrocław, and together with other regional Presidium members I moved into the Dolmel factory with a sleeping bag and air mattress. The factory had a common wall with the PaFaWag rail carriage factory. Together the factories employed thirteen thousand people. For several days I witnessed everyday life in this workers' collective during a strike mobilization. I breathed in the mood of the people readying themselves to fight. During the four hours of the strike, together with Władysław Frasyniuk, who recently had become the Wrocław Solidarity chairman, and a few Presidium colleagues, I toured the city visiting several of the most important factories. We saw exemplary organization and discipline everywhere. I was most struck by the appearance of the strike guards. They took over the functions usually served by the Industrial Guard (a paramilitary formation whose top command had ordered their officers to return their firearms to the military warehouses, just in case). Of course our strike guards had no firearms; they were armed only with the authority of their red-and-white armbands. In addition to the national colors, the armbands had the names of the organizations to which the guards belonged. People wearing Solidarity armbands stood next to people with Metalworker Trade Union armbands (this was a single-trade union that was the authorities' pet organization and was considered their ally) and next to people with a particularly striking label on their armband—the "Factory Party Committee." The Solidarity people, the single-trade unions, and the Party stood arm in arm against the government. Poland's top authorities entered into this confrontation in complete political isolation. They could not even count on members of their own party.

The situation behind the factory doors must have affected the government's negotiation stance. During the initial meeting, before the warning strike, the negotiating team headed by Deputy Prime Minister Rakowski was unbending. It was like talking to a brick wall. The Politburo apparently had instructed the government negotiators to insist that the militiamen in Bydgoszcz had acted properly. The governmental side also refused the possibility of even discussing the registration of the farmers' Solidarity. In these circumstances negotiating made no sense. It was only the spectacular success of the warning strike that opened the talks. On

March 30, a day before the Union-declared general strike, the final document of the negotiations was written. In point 1 the government admitted that the breaking up of the Provincial Council's session in Bydgoszcz "occurred without adhering to the rules of law," and "the use of law enforcement to remove the 'Solidarity' representatives from the building of the Provincial Hall was an action contrary to the accepted principle of resolving conflicts primarily by negotiations." The document announced that "the Prime Minister will make a decision regarding the deputy voivodes [who decided to interrupt the session] in mid-April after learning the opinion of the Voivodship Council." The government admitted that law enforcement "is responsible for the safety of the people under their charge." The government also expressed regret for the Union activists' beatings. They promised disciplinary actions against the officers who failed to provide security for their "charges" and an investigation to establish and criminally punish the perpetrators. "They will be judged according to the law," declared the agreement, "and 'Solidarity' will be able to participate in the process as the wronged side." Point 3 stated that both sides "will do everything possible to avoid conflicts in regard to the right to unionize individual farmers." The government declared that in regard to "the people who participated in the protests in Bydgoszcz," as well as the founding committees of the Union of Individual Farmers, the legality of their actions would not be questioned until the registration decision. This was equivalent to provisionally registering the farmers' Solidarity and promised a positive outcome for the registration proceedings. However, there was no agreement on amnesty for the 1970s opposition activists and on the withdrawal of the accusations against the KOR members.

Time was of the essence because the general strike was to start in eleven hours. Andrzej Gwiazda read the joint communiqué on the main edition of TV news at 7:30 p.m., with Wałęsa at his side. In its last point, the Solidarity side announced the suspension of the general strike. Theoretically the last word on this matter belonged to the Countrywide Coordination Commission that was to gather in Gdańsk on March 31. But the bomb detonator already had been unscrewed, and the KKP practically had no way to rearm it. On the other side, the government could not resort to the instruments of martial law after the publication of the communiqué and suspension of the strike. Such a move would not be justified, as violence needs some justification in order to be effective. The leaderships of both sides faced a fait accompli, and they reacted angrily.

At the March 31 Politburo meeting, the agreement aroused the objection not only of the representatives of the "concrete" (the Minister of Internal Affairs demanded outright that the agreement be revoked) but also stern criticism from Kania. Kania admitted that a dangerous social conflict had been avoided, but he asked, "Was it worth it to pay this high a price?" The first secretary was particularly outraged that the agreement virtually approved registering the individual farmers' union and the participation of the Solidarity representatives as a side in the investigation and trial for the Bydgoszcz Union leaders' beating. "Comrade Rakowski was not authorized to sign such an agreement." Kania also opposed the statement that the prime minister was to consider the complaints against the Bydgoszcz vice voivodes. "They did what we told them," the Party head stated unambiguously, so they should be promoted rather than recommended for punishment. These were very serious reservations that in fact led to the repudiation of the principal negotiator. But Kania stopped short of canceling the agreement because he thought this would be irresponsibly reckless. In the end, he said they had to put on a good face to a lousy deal, and then he consistently defended the agreement against the Kremlin's complaints.

A much more spectacular storm broke out at the two-day-long meeting of the KKP from March 31 to April 1. The revocation of the general strike was voted on the first day, but only because the KKP understood its own powerlessness. The communiqué on the agreement and the suspension of the general strike dissolved the huge tension in the society whose unprecedented mobilization had secured the success of the warning strike. Rejecting the agreed upon deal and returning to the strike scenario would not restore the lost power of attack; to the contrary, it would be the surest way to a defeat. The KKP felt powerless, and because its March 25 unambiguous resolution had been disregarded, it felt deprived of the right to make decisions. This fueled frustration in the activists representing their regions and prompted fierce criticism of the advisors as the movers behind the deal, as well as of Wałęsa.

The complaints were chiefly about the manner of making key decisions, the role of advisors who effectively sidelined the Union activists appointed to negotiate, and Wałęsa's firm resistance to call the KKP meeting on March 30. The third factor prevented the KKP from making a decision about the agreement and the strike. These criticisms were basically indisputable and were expected. The content of the agreement also was strongly criticized for being insufficient and that it merely deceived people with the pretense of success. This aspect may seem surprising today, when one looks at the negotiated results with a cool eye. The issue of the farmers' union that was at the core of the Bydgoszcz conflict was resolved according to the Union's wishes. In regard to the Union activists' beatings, our negotiators received a promise that the perpetrators would be punished. The authorities did not keep this promise, but at the negotiating table it would be difficult to achieve anything more than a promise that the perpetrators would be investigated, tried, and sentenced according to the law. What we actually won was important—the authorities admitted that they were wrong and we were right. This was significant for securing the safety of Union activists and activities, at least until the entire August agreements were nullified by force. It can be said that the KKP members were unfair in assessing the results of the negotiations because they were carried away by their emotions. But I won't say this because in this particular instance emotions were at the heart of the matter. This was a revolution and not a game of chess or a quarterly accounting. A revolution is a specific state of mind of great masses of people, thus a phenomenon based on popular emotions. These are dynamic and changing emotions, but they are governed by a certain logic—a logic of their own. Without taking these emotions and their inner logic into account, we cannot understand anything about these events.

These were the social emotions that brought Solidarity to the peak of its power at the very moment of the warning strike on March 27, 1981, while the authorities were losing the support of their own base and were politically isolated. This was the pivotal moment of the revolution. We, the regional activists who were camping in the factories designated as flagships for the great strike, physically felt the determination of the mass of workers surrounding us and ready to follow. It was "now or never" for these Joans of Arc of Solidarity. The demobilization order must have been a shock, especially because the decision was made behind their backs in a manner contrary to the arrangements made just a few days earlier.

The trade union Solidarity established itself as a countrywide organization, but its countrywide leadership structures were weak and unequal to the tasks. The KKP, that is, the representation of all the MKZs, was something like a congress. It gathered, proceeded, and voted resolutions every few weeks, sometimes more often if needs arose. But it was not a constantly working body, and it could not direct the Union's everyday activities. The so-called eleven, and later the KKP Presidium composed of the leaders of the largest regions, prepared the KKP meetings, but they could not reside permanently in Gdańsk.[55] The situation required instant reactions and decisions. The only body in the entire Union who was constantly on duty was the chairman Lech Wałęsa. There was also the spokesman—myself—but despite the substantial influence connected with this function, it was limited to communication with the media and members of Solidarity at large. The spokesman had no power to make any decisions on what the Union should do in a particular situation. But Wałęsa's exceedingly strong position was not as much the result of the weakness of the collegial bodies as the fact that millions of Solidarity members regarded him as the chief. I consciously use this archaic and very ambiguous term because I mean the kind of charismatic leadership in which the crowd treats their leader as its personification, as the embodiment of the movement.

Lech Wałęsa was a simple man, and in a sense he still is. He was not among those whom communist Poland gave the chance for a good education. He came from rural poverty. He only completed elementary school and vocational agricultural school. His way of thinking and acting in many ways had more to do with traditional peasant culture than with the intelligentsia's vision of a working-class conscience. Despite this, and in a sense because of this, the crowds of workers considered him one of them—blood of their blood and bone of their bones. There was a condescending adage, popular in the 1950s among Party nomenklatura, that the Polish working class still had one leg in the furrow. But even at the beginning of the 1980s, many decently educated Polish workers and intelligentsia, or even intellectuals, remembered their own peasant roots and were not prone to a boorish contempt toward "bumpkins." We had not yet not forgotten the land we came from.[56]

Of course not everyone can become a leader. Wałęsa knew how to talk, and probably since his youth he had been the center of attention, which is an indication of leadership skills. He spoke quickly, sometimes even faster than he thought, and he spoke a bit too much. But he had an exceptional gift for communicating with crowds and sensing what a crowd would want to hear. His famous "I am for it, and also against it" was not buffoonery or a comical slip of the tongue but an instant autocorrection when he felt he was not saying what people wanted to hear. More than once, Wałęsa completely changed the meaning of a sentence before he had finished, when he realized that the mood of the listeners required it. He certainly craved applause. He was not afraid of crowds and was able to communicate with them like no one else. A set of coincidences put him at the helm of a multimillion-strong movement, but he had skills that gave him the chance to be up for this unusual role. Of course there were moments when this helm "swung back" in his hands. When Wałęsa could not handle the situation, other charismatic leaders who had a magical influence on large crowds, such as Jacek Kuroń, were called to help. But Jacek, too, happened to suffer defeats because Solidarity was impossible to steer. Besides, he sometimes had different opinions than Wałęsa and his principal advisors.

These advisors already had participated in the MKS Commission of the Advisors during the August 1980 strike. Some of them, such as Bronisław Geremek or Andrzej Celiński, had roots in the TKN; others came from the circle of the opposition Catholic intellectuals associated with *Więź*, *Znak*, and the KIK, such as Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Andrzej Wielowieyski, and Bohdan Cywiński.[57] Since their first days in the Gdańsk Shipyard their guiding principle was to bring reason and understanding of the requirements of political realism to the crowds in order to prevent turning the swelling revolution into a national disaster. This did not bother me. Neither Geremek, Mazowiecki, nor the other advisors had any experience of participating in a mass protest movement (with the sole exception of Kuroń, who joined them later and was a different story altogether). As befitted refined intellectuals, most were best at addressing small audiences and were not convincing at large rallies. Above all, they were scared of a crowd and did not believe they could appeal to it with rational arguments.

They found (or they thought they found) Wałęsa’s ear because he really needed them. Aware of “Mr. Lech’s” standing as a chief and his incredible command of the masses, they decided to work through him. It was not true that they ensnared him, as Lech Dymarski of Poznań sarcastically suggested during the KKP “debriefing” meeting. There was nothing unusual in the fact that the advisors and Wałęsa were closely working together and using one another. Both sides of this symbiotic relationship worked jointly to reinforce Wałęsa’s dominating position versus the KKP and in the Union in general. The KKP meetings brought together less than a hundred people. Such an assembly is hardly a crowd, but Geremek and Mazowiecki correctly saw the KKP as an embodiment of the crowd. The way the representatives of the regions acted in the meeting hall resembled dietines in old Poland, and Geremek and Mazowiecki believed that the highest body of Solidarity was unpredictable.[58] What happened in the last days of March 1981 was a result of the lack of trust of our leading intellectuals in the KKP and the relationship developed over several months between the advisors, the chief, and the assembly representing the masses.

On the second day of the KKP “debriefing” discussion I decided to address this head on. “The problem is in the decision-making mechanism within the Union. Either it will be self-governing, or it won’t be independent. The Union . . . has developed in such a way that it is in fact, to put it simply, a king with his court, and a parliament. But because the king is not a puppet, his court is the one that rules, and not the parliament.” I am sure that nobody present in the hall had any doubts about who was the king and the court and who was the powerless parliament. I also considered this description as justification for my resignation as KKP spokesman. “Everyone has only one name, and I cannot attach my name to everything I am given. A person who feels this way cannot be KKP spokesman.” I did not submit my resignation to a vote because I suspected that because of the scent of rebellion against Wałęsa and the advisors it would be rejected, and I really wanted to resign. I acknowledged that the decision to forge the agreement and recall the strike could have been correct, but I was not sure. I insisted on my very critical assessment about the way the decision had been made, and especially at the informal manner that the Union was governed by the “king and his court.” In fact, my decision to resign was made on impulse, an aesthetic impulse dressed up with a rational justification. I tend to heed such impulses.

Today we know the long-range consequences of those events, as well as the then-secret documents of the top authorities of communist Poland, and partially also of the USSR and the allied states of the Warsaw Pact. In the light of this knowledge, I should revise my assessment.

There is no doubt that the internal situation in Poland was the underlying reason for the unplanned “Soyuz-81” military exercises that were extended for an indefinite period. Thirty thousand troops were brought into Poland for these exercises, and another 120,000 were on backup ready to enter Poland at a moment’s notice. This number of soldiers can count as an intervention force. It is also known that additional units of the Czechoslovak and East German armies were stationed at readiness near the borders.

The momentary rapprochement between Kania and the “concrete” in the Party leadership may have created hope in Moscow that the Polish authorities would finally decide to respond to the general strike with martial law. In any case, the Kremlin reacted with extreme ire to the news about the agreement between the government and Solidarity and recalling the strike. For another few days the military movements continued, including flights of Soviet military planes over Polish territory without notifying our airspace control. Many years later Colonel Ryszard Kukliński mentioned these flights in an interview for the Paris-based *Kultura* monthly. They could have been just a display of power, a way of expressing disapproval regarding the relations between allies. One can conclude that the Soviet leadership counted on something other than another pact between Polish authorities and the counter-revolution.

On the night of April 3, 1981, there was a secret meeting in a railroad car at the Polish-Soviet border near Brest-Litovsk. Kania and Jaruzelski participated on the Polish side, and Minister of Defense Ustinov and the then KGB head Andropov on the Soviet side.[59] In response to the Russians’ aggressive accusations of defeatism, Kania and Jaruzelski explained that the distribution of power in the last days of March was such that the likely outcome of a direct clash with Solidarity would be the defeat of the authorities. Andropov and Ustinov reported this at a Soviet Politburo meeting: “They [that is, Kania and Jaruzelski] were afraid of a warning strike, and even more of a general strike, and did everything possible not to let the latter happen. . . . As for bringing the army in [that is, an intervention], they said that it was absolutely impossible, and they also could not introduce martial law [in this situation].” The argument that the Party’s authority and the balance of power needed to be at least partially restored first must have persuaded the Kremlin’s representatives because, according to Kania, Andropov finally said, “OK, fine. Don’t introduce martial law now. But do not dally. Waiting is also expensive.”

Two days later the “Soyuz-81” exercises were over.

The removal of the threat of Soviet armed intervention, at least for a time, was the immediate and very important result of the agreement that Wałęsa and the advisors pushed through without the participation of the KKP. At the same time, this decision took us on the road to martial law. In the summer of 1981, during a party that involved alcohol, I met Roman Zimand for the first time in person.[60] He had been one of the most prominent writers for *Po Prostu* in 1956, a radical revisionist whom I revered. Now we talked about the prospects for the Solidarity revolution.

“Our only chance,” I said deeply convinced, “is to maintain such a balance of power so that the communists will not be able to crush us on their own. Maybe they won’t go for a Soviet intervention.”

“To the contrary,” responded Zimand, “our only chance is if the Polish communists finish us off themselves.”

This was cold-blooded realism taken to extreme and shocking consequences. Among these consequences was the acknowledgment that what happened to us in December 1981 was a lesser evil than what we had avoided at the end of March. This is the precise meaning of General Jaruzelski’s favorite phrase.[61] Zimand himself was not so consistent with his logic. Instead of resigning himself to martial law as a “lesser evil,” he fought it with his pen and actions in the underground and in the independent press.

SLIPPERY SLOPE

After the tanks that came to Poland on the pretext of the “Soyuz-81” exercises departed, Moscow’s pressure no longer took the form of demonstrations of military power, but it did not stop altogether. The Kremlin regarded each day of Solidarity’s existence as a threat. The approaching Extraordinary Ninth Congress of the PZPR (scheduled for July 1981) also caused great anxiety in Brezhnev’s circles, as well as those of Husák and Honecker. In light of the proceedings and outcomes of that congress, the Kremlin’s anxieties may seem a little ridiculous, but the Soviet party leaders were old enough to remember their own fear when they faced the congress of the Czechoslovak Communist Party in August 1968. I assume this fear haunted them in June 1981 as they were deciding what to do about the “Polish problem.” This time they decided to send their trusted allies in the Polish Party’s Central Committee to fight instead of tanks.

On June 5, 1981, the CPSU Central Committee issued a letter to the PZPR Central Committee. The authors warned that the counter-revolutionary offensive in Poland was close to overthrowing the socialist system because the PZPR leadership and the Polish government were constantly giving in to the counter-revolutionary forces instead of putting up a fight. The Kremlin leaders wrote to the members of the Polish KC, “Stanisław Kania and Wojciech Jaruzelski agreed with us during our talks . . . but nothing has changed,” because the fight against the counter-revolution had not started. In this situation, “forces hostile to socialism” set the tone for the precongress campaign, and it even seemed possible that at the upcoming Ninth Party Congress “the Marxist-Leninist side of the Party might be defeated” or even eradicated. It was up to the PZPR activists and leadership to prevent this disaster. “Yes, the leadership,” reiterated the Kremlin authors rhetorically, as if afraid that not all the Polish Central Committee members would get the allusion. “The Party can and should find enough strength within itself to reverse the flow of events and turn them in the proper direction.”

Jaruzelski and Kania were not the recipients of the letter but played the role of the accused. Moreover, in the letter they were mentioned only by their first and last names, without the title “comrade,” which was obligatory between communists. This meant that in Moscow’s eyes they were no longer worthy of that title. The apparatchiks who understood the internal code of party new speech read this as a clear sign that Moscow was suggesting the removal of Kania and Jaruzelski and the election of new leadership for the Party and government in order to secure a radical change before the Ninth Congress. The Polish “concrete” understood this suggestion, and in fact during the Eleventh Plenum (June 9 and 10, 1981) it made an attempt to overthrow the first secretary and the prime minister and elect a new Politburo. This did not work. The old leadership won a vote of confidence by a large majority. Among the majority that supported the first secretary and prime minister were most of the high-ranking Polish army officers who were members of the KC. To the Kremlin this was a sign that the good and loyal “concrete” comrades did not have an adequate power base in the Party and that Jaruzeski’s standing in the army was strong. Therefore they needed to work with him to push for the introduction of martial law. What was intended as a palace coup turned out to be a means of pressure. But this pressure was not ineffective.

During heated deliberations at a Politburo meeting, Kazimierz Barcikowski suggested that they should try to get the Solidarity leaders to appreciate the seriousness of Moscow’s letter. Kania replied that Solidarity was not about to change its confrontational attitude. But I discovered that the first secretary was not right about this. Józef Klasa, the head of the KC Press Department, issued a directive to distribute the Soviet letter via telex to all party cells. This was like passing the letter to the regional Solidarity bodies with whom many Factory Party Committees had good relationships. The Wrocław Regional Board got the Moscow letter from the Dolmel Factory Committee and discussed it at a meeting with several dozen activists. The Kremlin’s unceremonious intervention into the politics and personal affairs of the PZPR had an explosive effect. I had not seen such heat since November 1956 when the Poles backed Gomułka against Khrushchev’s attack.

At the same meeting we discussed the arrogant statement by Jan Rulewski that because of the Bydgoszcz case, he was ready to declare a strike even on the opening day of the Ninth Party Congress. This made the Wrocław activists, including Władysław Frasyniuk, so angry that they immediately wanted to vote for and publish a resolution condemning Rulewski’s irresponsible statement. I managed to persuade them that we should not quarrel between ourselves and instead we should accept the

Party invitation to send our representative to attend their precongress voivodship conference. We assigned this mission to Janusz Balenkowski of the Hydral factory, and I wrote his welcome address. He read it to the top Party assembly of our voivodship as if delivering an olive branch. He received an ovation, and the local television station reported it live. But this was the end of our rapprochement with the "leading forces of our nation."

Between June and August 1981 a conflict arose in the Wrocław Fadroma Road Machinery Factory. I do not remember whether its director died or left—in any case the position needed to be filled. According to the rules of the command-and-quota economy, the nomination should come from the next level of state economic administration, which was the Bumar Group.[62] But in fact, the Party decided who would be nominated. The Fadroma factory was of key importance to the national economy, therefore it belonged to the so-called Central Committee's nomenklatura. This meant the nomination should come from the KC Economy Department. Regionally significant companies were part of the Voivodship Committee's nomenklatura. There were no exceptions to this rule. As a matter of fact, it had a systemic character—candidates for foreman or brigade head had to have a factory Party committee recommendation, and candidates for prime minister or governmental minister had to have a Politburo recommendation.

Jerzy Tociński, the head of the Fadroma Solidarity Factory Commission, suggested that we change that custom. He proposed to organize a competition and nominate the winner. The fact that the Factory Party Committee and the Factory Council of Metalworkers' Trade Union consented to this says something about the lack of discipline in the country at that time. The competition jury was created jointly, and it proposed a candidate. However, the Party refused to recommend him. This was not because he lacked professional competence but because in the eyes of the Party the entire competition was a voluntarist action aimed at the cadre-nominating prerogative of the Party apparatus. Indeed this was the case. We were beginning to build workers' self-governance through facts on the ground. But the corporation knew its place and did not dare to appoint the competition winner without Central Committee approval. The Factory Commission reacted to this obstruction by declaring strike readiness and announcing the strike date.[63] From the perspective of the Union’s countrywide strategy, the issue was very serious, and the Wrocław MKZ backed the Fadroma colleagues with strike readiness throughout the entire region. The authorities gave in. On the day the strike was to begin, the Bumar Group CEO came to Fadroma to formally appoint the competition winner. I was there as a representative from the Union’s regional leadership. It was really a celebration, and the CEO delivered a speech. It contained a sentence that I remember verbatim: “A strange and dangerous situation has developed in our country. The old system of running the economy has practically ceased to exist, and no new system has emerged.” This pointed remark could have been applied not just to the economy but to the entire state.

In the summer of 1981 the economic crisis became a political threat not just to the government but to Solidarity as well. Ration coupons for meat, butter, rice, and buckwheat (kasha) were introduced in April 1981 in accordance with the Gdańsk Accord. But soon there was not enough food to cover the rations, and just before the Party congress, the meager allotments were cut by one-fifth. The country was boiling over. In Łódź, Solidarity organized a mass street demonstration called a “hunger march.” In other cities the Union also tried to funnel the social protests in this way. But it was a dead-end street. It made no sense to demand that the authorities feed people from an empty plate. Up to that point we declared that it was up to the government to fix the economy. This reality forced us to admit it also was our problem.

The collapse of the market had several causes, including the salary increases that resulted from the July and August 1980 strikes. These increases were not accompanied by an increase in supply of goods; still, they were considered necessary. In July, to avoid political concessions, the government suppressed the strikes with worthless money. The August strike was stopped with political concessions, but they also were accompanied by another pay increase, a so-called *wałęsówka*, for which of course there were no supplies either. Neither the government nor the

Union could back away from these agreements. Even if combined with fixed prices, they caused dramatic shortages.

On top of this, the Polish economy was suffocating in the noose of international debt. This was an expensive bill for the years of Gierek's welfare. Servicing foreign debt was eating up almost all export income (mainly from exporting coal), and more and more factories had to limit their production because of the lack of imported components.

To make things even worse, the organizing functions of the state were paralyzed. The economy in "real socialism" did not work through the market but by command. This was not an effective system, but somehow it worked. However, when the commands were no longer followed at the level of implementation and middle management often did not dare to implement these commands, chaos ensued. The economy previously functioned as an extension of the political dictatorship. Now the dictatorship's deep imbalance caused economic paralysis. Once an element incompatible with the system's inner logic—that is, a powerful social movement capable of blocking the authorities' decisions—was introduced without other changes in the system, it was impossible to avoid a crisis. Any attempt to escape this conundrum necessarily undermined the foundation of the dictatorship.

From the spring of 1981 an associated organization emerged within Solidarity, the so-called Leading Enterprises' Union Network, simply called "the Network."[64] It worked on developing programmatic ideas. Its tenor was set by Union scholars, including philosopher Leszek Nowak from Poznań University and Leszek Balcerowicz, a theorist-economist and student of economic systems who first worked at the Institute of Marxism-Leninism and then at the Warsaw School of Economics (SGH).[65] "The Network" developed the idea that Solidarity should not wait for the authorities' initiatives but should propose its own economic reforms based on the independence of factories. These reforms would operate not by centralized commands and distribution but according to the demands of the market and by the rules of workers' self-governance.

I took an active part in developing Solidarity's new strategy oriented toward economic reform and employees' self-governance. At the precongress KKP meeting on August 12, I gave the opening speech about this issue for the discussion on the Union's strategy. Minister Ciosek, who attended our meeting, spoke and admitted that "perhaps we need to take the bull by the horns and think about the problem of the nomenklatura in the light of economic reform." Ciosek's ability to think openly about these matters was exceptional among the Party apparatus. Usually a defensive reflex dominated because our new program undermined something that was especially valuable to them, that is, the privilege to place their people in directorships. However, we had to start this program, even if it opened another area of conflict between Solidarity and the Party and further united our adversaries. We offered the government our consent for the price increases (that were necessary anyway) in exchange for its cooperation in matters of economic reform and employees' self-governance. But we did not receive a positive response. Therefore we had to launch some means of pressure—except that it could no longer be a strike threat. In September and October 1981, during the first Solidarity congress that was held in two parts, we managed to launch political instruments of pressure regarding employees' self-governance. The conflict about the shape of self-governing bodies in factories and the rules for appointing factory executives was resolved in a completely unusual manner—as an agreement between Solidarity during its congress, the Party leadership, and the Sejm. Surprisingly, not just the Party and Solidarity but also the Sejm acted as if they were capable of making independent decisions.

It started as usual. For a few weeks the authorities acted as if they wanted to show themselves and everyone around them that they were firm. A day before the beginning of Solidarity's congress, the government presented the Sejm with vote-ready bills on state-owned industrial enterprise and the self-governance of its workers. The bills excluded the possibility for even partial implementation of our demands. A CEO was to be nominated by "the central or local state administration with the approval of the worker's council." The candidates were to be selected in a competition by a jury "appointed by an appropriate state administration." This jury would include, alongside a representative of the Workers' Council, representatives from the Party, trade unions, socialist youth organizations, social organizations active in the factory, and the founding body (that is, the state ministry or a corporation). “Don’t delude yourselves, gentlemen [about self-governance].”[66]

The congress had to react to this quickly and strongly enough to halt the legislative engine. It adopted a resolution, a key point of which was a call for the Sejm to organize a nation-wide referendum on this issue.

The congress declared that “the defense of the so-called nomenklatura [in the governmental bills] is an attempt at preserving the same system of selecting cadres in which the executives who were nominated according to political criteria drove our economy into its present disaster. The official propaganda maintains that the governmental bills are supported by a majority of the society. Therefore in accordance with Article 8 pt. 1 of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Poland, the ‘Solidarity’ Congress requests that the Sejm resolve to hold a nationwide referendum about the scope of factory self-governing bodies as soon as possible. . . . The Congress also resolves that if the state organs refuse to hold the referendum, the Union will conduct its own referendum in the factories. The delegates to the First ‘Solidarity’ Congress hope that the representatives to the Sejm will consider the will of the factory workers and make a decision that will respect their aspirations. Therefore the delegates to the First Congress ask the Sejm not to adopt the legislation in the form that the government is attempting to impose.”

It worked. On September 15 the Sejm committees adopted the governmental bills for both laws, but there was unrest among the representatives. A competing trend emerged in the parliamentary caucuses of the United Farmers Party and Democratic Alliance, as well as in the nonpartisan caucus led by Karol Małcużyński, and even among some Party representatives.[67] The Party leadership must have been worried about the ultimate result of the plenary vote. Nothing like this had been seen in the Wiejska Street building since the 1940s, but the political situation and mood in society were so unusual that even the independence of representatives was possible. Before the Sejm’s plenary session scheduled for September 24, a group of Party representatives (Adam Łopatka, Zbigniew Giertych, and Zdzisław Czeszejko-Sochacki) suggested an additional meeting to seek a compromise to our negotiators (Mieczysław Gil and Szymon Jakubowicz). The Party initiators of that meeting were known as predictable people, therefore it was possible to speculate that the Party leadership had something up their sleeve. Jacek Kuroń suspected this, but it was impossible to verify. In any case, at the meeting they managed to develop a proposal for a compromise. To describe it in the simplest way, this compromise consisted of a general rule that a competition is held for a factory CEO who is then appointed by the Employees Council. A number of factories of strategic importance for the country would be exempt from this rule, and their executives would be nominated by the factory overseeing body with approval from the Employees Council. The list of “exceptions” was to be negotiated between the government and the trade unions. Probably more than one devil was in the details, but both sides were counting on either cheating the devil or winning him over.

However, the pressure of time was much more dangerous than the devil in the details. The Union had to decide about accepting or rejecting this compromise in the space of one or two days left before the Sejm vote. The negotiators acted with a mandate from the congress of the Union. But they were not able to turn to the congress to ratify or reject the deal because it was happening between its first and second sessions—the assembly was simply not present in Gdańsk. There was no time to call in the full KKP; besides, its mandate was about to expire. Jacek Kuroń even thought that the quiet consent of the Party leadership was a trap designed to make us reject the offer and then blame Solidarity for wasting the last chance for an agreement. In his opinion we should turn the trap around and accept the compromise through a KKP Presidium decision. He managed to convince the others, even though not all Presidium members were present. The compromise was accepted by yea votes of Lech Wałęsa, Stanisław Wądołowski (Szczecin), and Tadeusz Jedynak (Upper Silesia) and a nay from Jan Rulewski (Bydgoszcz). Kuroń, Gil, and Jakubowicz pressed for a yea vote, but as they were not Presidium members, they could not vote themselves. When the decision was made, the negotiators immediately returned to Warsaw, where the Party leadership once more tried to force changes to the agreement, but—something unheard of—the majority of the Sejm commission did not consent. Kazimierz Barcikowski and Andrzej Werblan probably convinced Kania at the last moment not to risk a defeat in the Sejm plenary session and give up. Ultimately the Sejm adopted the compromise version of the law.

A storm, as was to be expected, broke out in the Gdańsk Olivia Arena during the second session of the Solidarity Congress.[68] Even Jacek Kuroń, as he later admitted in his memoir *Gwiezdny czas*, saw the analogy with the March 30, 1981, Warsaw agreement.[69] The decision was made by a few people behind the congress's back in the same way that it had been made behind the KKP's back. The difference this time was that Kuroń along with Wałęsa, and not Mazowiecki and Geremek along with Wałęsa, were blamed for usurping the decision-making powers of the Union's principal body. One speaker after another castigated the negotiators and decision makers for voluntarily limiting the demands that were written into the resolution that the congress had adopted virtually unanimously. I tried to defend the achieved compromise and even managed to calm the waters a little, but the thunder still resounded for some time. Of the critics, only Grzegorz Palka somberly noted that we could not reject it because then we would be left with nothing, and moreover we will find ourselves on the losing side politically and PR-wise. Eventually the congress ratified the compromise, but it expressed its discontent.

During a discussion at the Politburo meeting on September 8, 1981, Kazimierz Barcikowski correctly predicted that the Solidarity attacks against appointing executives from the nomenklatura "should prompt the cadre to defend its interests." The central and provincial Party apparatus, who were the principal beneficiaries of the nomenklatura, felt threatened and were closing ranks. In the wake of the "horizontal structures'" defeat at the Ninth Party Congress and following the elections of the new Party officials in all voivodships, the Party stiffened its attitude toward the social movement and uniformly and openly treated it as a hostile force. The political evolution of the ruling apparatus and not just Soviet pressure was pushing to get rid of Solidarity by force. This attitude had predominated in the MSW for some time, and in September and October it turned out that it was the case in the army as well. Kania also swam with the current. He made increasingly confrontational decisions, stiffened his rhetoric, and kept repeating the mantra of the Leninist catchphrase "Who, whom?"[70]

He admitted that selective repressions were necessary. But he still opposed a large-scale military action against Solidarity. Hence he became an obstacle for his own political camp on its way toward martial law.

On September 13, 1981, the Committee for the Defense of the Country (KOK) met in Warsaw.[71] This committee included the prime minister, the Ministers of Defense and Internal Affairs as *ex officio* members, as well as the top ranking officers of both ministries, and the Party first secretary. At the historical conference in Jachranka mentioned earlier, I had heard Stanisław Kania talking about that meeting. According to him, the generals and colonels from the army, militia, and security services all were turning to him with the plea, “Comrade secretary, we can’t go on like this any longer! The counter-revolution has us by our throats. It is high time to introduce martial law.” Kania always responded, “We haven’t yet exhausted all political means, and we don’t need to resort to such extreme measures.” The same interchange had occurred two weeks later during a teleconference with voivodship Party secretaries (the new ones elected in the wake of the Ninth Party Congress)—“Things are impossible, comrade secretary, we must introduce martial law.” Kania gave the same response, “First we need to exhaust all political means.” But he was alone in this.

Neither General Florian Siwicki nor General Jaruzelski contradicted Kania, although the latter showed his displeasure behind the scenes. He had good reason for it. From what Kania had said, it was clear that he had not stood up in defense of the first secretary against the attacks of his subordinates, even though he was at the KOK meeting as the prime minister and Minister of Defense. Kania’s version is confirmed in the intelligence report about the September KOK meeting sent by Colonel Kukliński to the CIA. According to the report, the KOK members advocated for the introduction of martial law, and Kania was the only one against it. In this respect Kania as the Party head was opposed not only by Moscow but also by the army, militia, and SB leadership, as well as by his own Party. As a matter of fact, he was not in charge anymore. It is no wonder that he resigned during the KC Fourth Plenum (October 16–17, 1981). In his stead, General Jaruzelski was elected the first secretary. In its final declaration, the Central Committee deemed that “if necessary, the authorities of the

People's Poland should resort to their constitutional prerogative to protect the vital interests of the nation and the state."

I learned about the results of the Plenum from the French press. As it happened, I had received an invitation for a six-week-long research scholarship at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris. On the third day after my arrival in France, I read in *Le Monde* about the KC Plenum, Kania's resignation, and General Jaruzelski's acquiring triple power over the Party, government, and army. I immediately realized how ridiculous my predictions and anxieties were. Clearly an entirely different scenario was emerging. I sat on the edge of my seat in the best Paris libraries among otherwise inaccessible books constantly worrying if I could manage to get back to Poland in time. Luckily I did—I landed in Warsaw on November 27, 1981.

WAR

After my six-week-long absence from Poland, I noticed that Solidarity was weakened and was acting incoherently. On the other hand, the government was conducting a relatively effective propaganda campaign against the Union. The government was turning negotiations into an instrument of "black" propaganda at the expense of its own credibility as a negotiator. Social conflict also had become a propaganda tool. This peculiar strategy had already appeared earlier. At the beginning of August 1981, the Factory Commission at the Warsaw public transportation authority MZK (in which "true Poles" predominated) decided to organize a protest against the reduction of coupon rations by driving a column of buses and heavy equipment from the city maintenance authority MPO through the streets of Warsaw. The planned route was through Marszałkowska Street, Aleje Jerozolimskie, and Nowy Świat near the KC building. City Hall did not agree to this route and ordered the protesters to continue straight down Marszałkowska Street. The organizers insisted on turning left onto Aleje Jerozolimskie, but the demonstration met a live obstacle—a row of traffic enforcement militia officers. The buses and dump trucks stopped at the intersection, blocking traffic in the city center for several days. The state television delighted in showing the thin line of guardians of public order in their white caps and parade uniforms, armed only with traffic paddles. The protest organizers were very pleased with themselves; as Warsaw natives they probably did not realize that there was any other Poland beyond the city limits, whereas in the eyes of the rest of the country blocking the intersection simply looked like some proxy action that they did not understand. For people from Wrocław, Poznań, or Koluszki, the struggle of Warsaw Solidarity to be allowed to turn left was just an embarrassing quarrel. But the government loved it. Every new blockade day improved its standing. This was a perfect artillery shelling before the announced negotiations with Solidarity.

After a week, the protesters gave in and drove straight to help the Union leaders in their negotiations with the government. I participated in these negotiations. We did not approve the final communiqué prepared by the advisors on both sides (the future spokesman of the government, Jerzy Urban, was then an advisor for the government).[72] The text seemed too general, and besides, the governmental side included a reprimand for Solidarity. So the negotiations did not conclude with an agreement. The next day we were surprised to learn from the press and the media that we had broken the negotiations. The government started an unprecedented propaganda campaign based on their own claim. They managed to cause considerable confusion in society. We learned the lesson that it was not safe to sit with them at the table. If the objective is dialogue, one should not provoke such distrust. But if psychologically preparing society for an upcoming war, one does not need to care about credibility in the eyes of the enemy.

In some respect the Warsaw blockade served as a model for many of the fall 1981 strikes and protests. On the surface, each strike was very different from the others and from the Warsaw squabble about turning left, but they all had an important common characteristic. They were fierce local conflicts, exciting the locals, but incomprehensible to the rest of the country. The lengthy strike about the PGR director in Lubogóra was one such conflict.[73] It involved the Ziemia Lubuska Solidarity region, whereas the inhabitants in the other regions shrugged their shoulders. The same situation occurred with the endless conflict about Rector Michał Hebda of Radom’s College of Engineering.[74] It was very important to the students associated with the NZS, while other groups were indifferent. The interminable strike of the Żyrardów women textile workers was perceived similarly.[75] They demanded improvements in the inadequate supplies in their local grocery stores. This was a common problem everywhere in Poland, but the people in other regions saw no reason to support the demands to specifically increase the food supply in the Skierniewice voivodship. Such protests scattered our great movement into separate islands not connected to each other, and the authorities were not in a hurry to quench small fires. They stirred up a propaganda campaign against Solidarity, blaming it for creating anarchy in daily life and acting against the "common good."

At the end of October, the KK decided to combine the scattered and sluggish protests into one hour-long countrywide strike and appealed to the Union's local branches to stop their strikes.[76] But the countrywide strike turned out to be weak—weaker than the October 1980 strike, and much weaker than the one in March 1981. What was even worse, the call to end local strikes was ignored. This was a show of weakness that the authorities noticed.

On November 27, during the talks with the Solidarity delegation, the government representatives announced the introduction of new rules for companies beginning in the first quarter of 1982—the so-called systemic provisorium. The draft of the new economic order for the country was not even shown to the Union negotiators "because the typists did not manage to copy it, and the Council of Ministers is going to adopt it in two days' time anyway." To put it the simplest way, the "provisorium" would introduce self-financing without independence. The companies would only be permitted to raise prices on their own initiative for some goods (so-called negotiated prices). Combined with the intended rise of regulated prices, this would cause a drop in real wages by one-fourth, and indeed this proved to be the case in 1982. Such a drastic move either could be done under the umbrella of Solidarity (providing that a comprehensive agreement could be reached) or at gunpoint. Because the government decided not to talk about this with Solidarity, it became clear they really intended to use guns.

Soon we learned from our friends in the Sejm exactly what gun was to be used. A bill was submitted to the Sejm on extraordinary measures for the government. The law would introduce a ban on strikes and the militarization of companies. Managers would become commanders, and workers would become soldiers, for whom disobeying an order, and especially striking, would be punishable by a military court. The law also would introduce a prohibition on assemblies and traveling beyond the place of permanent residence without an administrative permit. This meant a state of emergency. The Constitution of the People's Poland mentioned a state of war that could be introduced by the Council of the State; however, there was no law that would specify what this state would be. Our legal experts advised us that in the absence of legal rules, for the time being this state of war was an empty term. The law on extraordinary measures was to substitute for it. It was milder than the martial law that was eventually introduced on December 13; still, we had no doubt that it was to be used to eliminate Solidarity by force. If anyone doubted how strikes could be suppressed, he could watch the live broadcast of the helicopter-borne attack on December 2, 1981, at the College of Firefighter Officers and see the participants of the strike there, including the vice chairman of Mazowsze Solidarity, Seweryn Jaworski, being escorted to the militia vans.

It was clear we had to prepare to defend ourselves—it was a do-or-die moment for the Union. A meeting of the KK Presidium was called for December 2 at Hotel Solec in Warsaw to discuss what to do, followed by a conference of the Presidium and the heads of the regional boards on December 3 in Radom. Władysław Frasyniuk asked me to join him at these meetings. I participated actively, and the regime propaganda amplified my statements. On December 2 the Presidium decided that the next day it would suggest to the regional heads that Solidarity's answer to a state of emergency should be a countrywide general strike. The assembly that gathered the next day in Radom was not a formal Union body but consisted of people who were to play an especially important role in the confrontation—preparing for a strike and leading it were statutory obligations of the heads of the regions. The declaration adopted on December 3 described the Union strategy for a situation in which the authorities would try to crush Solidarity by force. This was the last document by Solidarity leadership that reached the regions and the factory commissions. The resolutions of the last KK meeting in Gdańsk on

December 12, 1981, went nowhere—phones and telefaxes were already out, and after the meeting ended, the militia started hunting its participants.

The Radom conference became well known, not so much because the adopted resolution (which I had the honor of editing) reached the provincial and local Solidarity cells but mostly because the conference discussions were continuously trumpeted on the radio and television. The speeches by a few of the participants were hugely popularized by the regime media in a version that was deliberately falsified. This was already a propaganda overture to martial law in which doctored fragments of my speech were a real hit. It is appropriate for me now to describe what really happened.

In Radom the speaker prior to me was attorney Władysław Siła-Nowicki, an extraordinarily conciliatory man with a dovish heart. He tried to convince the audience that the government was not heading toward a confrontation because Seweryn Jaworski, who had been arrested the previous day during the ZOMO attack at the firefighters' school in Warsaw, was back with us. "If they had wanted a confrontation, they would have put him in Mokotów prison." I was quoting these words in order to discuss them, but the radio edited out the discussion aspect, and the words I intended to contradict were presented as my own opinion. I argued that the state of emergency was a logical consequence of the economic policy that had been already chosen by the authorities. I emphasized that not every one of our demands needed to be supported by the threat of strike, but "we have to respond with a general strike when an axe is being waved above our heads." If we wanted the government to abandon the idea of a confrontation, we should leave no doubt that "the answer to slaughtering the Union will be a general strike." Therefore we had "to clearly tell them that this will be their final struggle.[77] It is a matter of a [general] strike in the case that a state of emergency is declared, and this must be included in our resolution." This entire reasoning was removed. The metaphor about the final struggle was appended to the quotation from Siła-Nowicki—of course without the rest of the sentence explaining that it is about a clear and credible warning of a strike in case of a state of emergency. In this way, with glue and scissors, the call for self-defense in case of mortal danger was turned into a call to jump at the government’s throat when it meant no harm. With this reasoning it made sense that the introduction of martial law was an act of necessary self-defense by the people’s government. Spreading this image in society was a task for the officers of psychological warfare, warning shots before the actual attack of tanks and ZOMO detachments on Polish factories.

À la guerre comme à la guerre—war is war, and the ends justify the means. The meeting of Solidarity leaders in Radom was held behind closed doors. The press was not admitted, and the participants were told not to use their personal tape recorders. A recording came either from a bugging device or from Eligiusz Naszkowski, who was the chairman of the Piła region (and an SB secret agent code named “Grażyna”). It makes no difference which, as at that time using and manipulating such material in the media would have been seen as scandalous and disgraceful. Only in free Poland after 1989 did such practices become commonplace. In the People’s Poland after 1956, the SB was more duplicitous. For instance, it camouflaged recordings from defense lawyer visitations in prisons as ostensible reports from custom agents. The special services of the Third and especially the Fourth Republic were more audacious, convinced that because of their moral superiority they were more entitled.[78] Therefore the warnings coming from old experiences unfortunately lost none of their currency. Eavesdropping was still valued, its public use still in fashion, and propaganda miracles done with tape were still in use. But when on December 5, 1981, the government media aired the prepared recordings from Radom, in our eyes it was an astonishing trick that foreshowed astonishing means and events.

The media also used excerpts from Wałęsa’s speech (“pulling out each other’s jaws” and “there must be a confrontation”) in the Radom tape collage. This was a signal that the tale about the good workers’ leader and the evil extremists had been discarded. Now the entire Solidarity was to be slaughtered, starting with its chairman.

On the night of December 13, 1981, I was caught in the roundup, thanks to the sluggish workings of democracy. There was no way we could have known that our discussions would be a waste of time because our resolutions would not reach anybody. On the other hand, having the entire KK in one place made it easy for the militia and SB to catch us. During our discussions tempers flared more than usual. Some delegates wanted to elect the Sejm and form a government, while Jan Olszewski and Władysław Siła-Nowicki called for the Radom resolution to be annulled and for a unilateral declaration of a "truce in society." In reality, nothing could hurt the Union any longer on either side on the evening of December 12. In the end we managed to tweak a resolution that had been proposed by Rulewski, along with a statement written by me, and passed it as two complementary documents. But before we managed this, the last train from Gdańsk to Wrocław left with Władysław Frasyniuk and the other Wrocław delegates. Thus they escaped being interned.

When I was leaving the shipyard, the proceedings were still going on. I already knew that the phones and telexes had been switched off, and I realized—correctly but too late—that perhaps instead of introducing the state of emergency under the cover of the Sejm, General Jaruzelski would introduce it under the cover of night. But Gdańsk streets were empty that evening—no suspicious cars were parked at the curb, and there were no plainclothes or militiamen. So I thought it would not happen that night, and instead of waiting aimlessly at the train station, I took the rapid transit train to Sopot. I was dead tired. All the delegates were put up recklessly together at the Grand Hotel. I got there at the last moment—as soon as I entered my room, through the window I saw vans approaching and militiamen in "moro" uniforms and helmets with submachine guns forming a row on the street.[79] I ran to the corridor where the windows faced the beach, and I saw a line of officers stamping their feet in the snow. I gave up any thought of escape and went up a flight to Tadeusz Mazowiecki's large room. I found him with a group of colleagues. They were discussing completely seriously what the ZOMO presence at the hotel meant. I asked if anyone wanted to take a shower. They all looked at me with surprise and declined. "Then I will," I said, and went into the bathroom. This was selfish of me. I was the only one who was familiar with prison regulations, and I knew that showers only were taken once a week in prison. I managed to take a shower before the ZOMO entered the room. I stepped onto my new path (not really that new for me) clean and refreshed. However, my colleagues, handcuffed like me, sat in the police truck all dirty as if they had been bailing hay. I made the excuse to myself that they all could not have taken showers anyway, and an old prisoner had more rights than rookies.

Initially we were interned in Strzebielinek. This was the so-called branch facility of the Wejherowo prison. Its appearance and atmosphere reminded me of a POW camp, but I did not stay there for long. On December 30, fourteen people were transferred, including Jacek Kuroń, Andrzej Gwiazda, Jan Rulewski, Henryk Wujec, Janusz Onyszkiewicz, Seweryn Jaworski, Grzegorz Palka, Andrzej Rozpłochowski, Andrzej Sobieraj from Radom, Antoni Tokarczuk from Bydgoszcz, Czesław Kijanka from Przemyśl, and myself. We were escorted to the militia truck between two rows of jeering ZOMO troopers, "Salute the government ministers, they are heading for warmer climates!" I became scared. I thought that maybe one of the "willing" Western countries had in fact agreed to play the thankless role of kind warden for the prisoners of the Polish junta. There had been rumors that our generals had discreetly inquired about this matter with the Greek or even West German governments. But a helicopter was waiting for us at the Babie Doły military airport in Gdynia. This indicated a flight within Poland.

Inside the helicopter we were handcuffed in pairs. I was handcuffed to Seweryn Jaworski, and Jan Rulewski with Henryk Wujec. Antoni Tokarczuk, who was Rulewski's deputy on the Bydgoszcz Solidarity board, looked pensively at his boss and remarked, "Jan, you always said you had no connections to KOR . . ." This jinxed it—later Rulewski and Wujec, like most of us, were included in the so-called eleven who were not released together with the rest of the internees.[80] Instead we were moved to and remained in the Mokotów prison until the July 1984 amnesty, charged with attempting to overthrow the system.

The helicopter took us to Warsaw. For the time being our destination was to be Białołęka. We were not put in the barracks in the Prisoner Work Center that had been turned into an "isolation center" but rather into the Fourth Ward of the investigation unit.[81] They had prepared seven two-person cells for us, next to each other. These cells were equipped for isolation—there was a tin "basket" outside the window, window bars, an additional bar-cage (the so-called tiger cage) covering the window from the inside, and a “karmnik” (food slot) in the door. Their internment camp in the Prisoner Work Center was at some distance, and it was effectively separated from our ward. Shortly after we arrived, Adam Michnik was transferred from the internment camp to join us. Along with the fear that we would be deported to “warmer climates,” we started assuming that we had been selected for a show trial about an antistate plot. Such a trial would serve to demonstrate to society the extent to which the system was in peril and thus to legitimize martial law. But we were not formally presented with any charges, and they did not begin to interrogate us. Only in the Mokotów prison in the early spring of 1984, when I received my files as an accused, did I learn that the case already had been under investigation for two years. The first witness interrogations in the case of the “conspiratorial activities” of some Solidarity activists were held, if I remember correctly, in January or February 1982. SB Captain Wiktor Fonfara was particularly zealous. Later in free Poland he was promoted to a general for the so-called Oleksy case.[82] But our trial would have to be conducted following the prescribed scenario that even the SB officers described as “chamówa” (“ram it down their throats”). If it were to make any political sense to the junta, the trial would have to be held at the very beginning of martial law, and only if the authorities had chosen the policy of absolute terror. But General Jaruzelski’s group hesitated and eventually abandoned this harsh scenario. The investigation was initiated, but its principal heroes received prosecutorial charges only on September 3, 1982 (five KOR members) and December 22, 1982 (seven KK members).[83] This was way too late. The people who were arrested and charged became a burden for the generals, and they had a problem figuring out how to release them without losing face.

The eyes of the entire Polish Solidarity were upon us when we were interned, and even more so when after a year, instead of being released from the Białołęka “isolation center” after it closed, we were simply transferred to the Mokotów prison with arrest warrants. We felt their eyes and tried to meet their expectations. From Białołęka, where the isolation was not very strict, we sent “kites” to our underground colleagues. Jacek

Kuroń sent his article with the telling title “Now We Have the Golden Horn” to the underground journal *Tygodnik Mazowsze*.[84] The text was published, but the members of the Provisional Coordination Commission (TKK) who led the underground resistance did not heed it, despite their great respect for Jacek. First of all they did not want to risk bloodshed, and unlike us, they knew that after the December defeat of strike resistance there was no appetite for insurgency in Poland. The TKK geared up for a long march.

We had a faint idea of what was going on outside prison. We had family visits (supervised, of course), and we saw the priests who paid us pastoral visits, and sometimes we even got copies of underground publications. But this could not make up for direct contact with the changed reality. Our relatives and priests tried to keep up our spirits, which was not conducive to a somber assessment of Poland under martial law. We had access to *Trybuna Ludu* and the venomous loudspeaker propaganda, but we (rightly) did not trust these sources.

Initially we did not know what had happened to Wałęsa. He was a very important person during martial law. If the eyes of Solidarity activists who continued to resist were focused on us, what could we say about that charismatic leader who in the eyes of millions of Poles was the symbolic personification of Solidarity? The “crow” (as the Military Council of National Salvation was commonly called) of course realized this.[85] We feared that it would try to pressure Wałęsa, who was alone and isolated, in order to use him to diffuse the social resistance. Andrzej Gwiazda was almost positive that “Lesiu,” as he called Wałęsa, would give in to the pressure because he was “their man.” Because Wałęsa had achieved the position of an independent leader in the Union, he had stopped listening to his colleagues and the cofounders of the WZZ-W. Instead he tended to follow the advice of Mazowiecki, Geremek, and Andrzej Celiński, as well as the council of bishops and envoys of the Primate. In addition, he was making deals with the communist authorities. The “free unionists’” vague suspicions about Wałęsa’s five-day detention by the SB in 1970 had turned into certainty. They concluded that when Wałęsa was detained, he had been enlisted by the SB and had become their secret informer, that is, an “agent of influence,” through whom they were secretly directing our moves. The best evidence for this was that “Lesiu” often did not agree with his former opposition colleagues and even fought them and tried to push them to the sidelines within the Union.

On December 13, 1981, Wałęsa was taken from his home with no legal basis and initially placed in something like a golden cage—the MSW villa in Chylice near Warsaw. There he was visited by Deputy Prime Minister Rakowski, Minister Ciosek, and the high-ranking representatives of the “crow.” They tried to convince him to become the leader of a puppet Solidarity that would be reactivated and purged of “extremists” and every kind of antisocialist element selected by the militarized authorities. This was the so-called operation Renaissance, likely devised by the MSW (as the code name suggests). This was very dangerous for us. Had Wałęsa agreed to this, the underground would have lost its standing. The power of the symbol would turn against those who wanted to continue resistance against all odds.

I think that for some time Wałęsa had been deceiving the government envoys as was his habit, but it is certain that eventually he firmly refused. Only then, nearly a month and a half after his actual imprisonment, was Wałęsa issued an internment decision dated January 26, 1982. He used the document as stationery and wrote a “kite” on it. Through visiting priests, we received it at the Fourth Ward of Białołęka prison. The chairman of the Union called for the KK interned members to stand firm. He wrote, “Don’t give an inch!”—no dealing with the authorities.

On October 8, 1982, our chairman wrote an ambiguous and somewhat clownish letter to General Jaruzelski from his internment in Arłamów in the Bieszczady Mountains and signed it “Corporal Lech Wałęsa.” Among the Solidarity activists this letter caused consternation, while among the authorities it stirred hope and an appetite for more. General Kiszczak went to Arłamów to press the sender to write something more serious. Wałęsa refused. Despite this, he was released from internment and taken directly to the headquarters of the Military Prosecution Office in Warsaw. There, on November 14, he met with Colonel Bolesław Kliś, the head of Division V of the Main Military Prosecutor’s Office, and Colonel Hipolit Starszak, the head of the MSW Bureau of Investigations. The official purpose was to acquaint Wałęsa with the martial law legal regulations. This was standard procedure when releasing opposition activists. They were asked to confirm with their signatures that they had been informed of these regulations. Wałęsa refused to sign and had a long conversation with the colonels. The meeting was recorded, and a transcript was made, undoubtedly in order to accurately inform the top authorities but also in hopes that the material could be used to compromise Wałęsa in the eyes of the Solidarity activists. The transcript was published precisely for this purpose (even if much later) by Stanisław Cenckiewicz and Piotr Gontarczyk of IPN in their book *The SB and Lech Wałęsa*.[86] Indeed, some statements made by Wałęsa in that conversation with high-ranking enforcement were at least troublesome. Perhaps these particular statements reaffirmed the authorities' conviction that releasing Wałęsa from internment would help to undermine the authority of the TKK and destroy or at least significantly weaken the underground Solidarity. But nothing of the kind happened. To the contrary, on April 9, 1983, Wałęsa escaped his escort, left Gdańsk, and had a clandestine meeting with the underground leadership. Their joint declaration confirmed the TKK as Solidarity's temporary leadership. Again, the result was the opposite of what the designers of "operation Renaissance" intended. As our chairman said in his inimitable slang, once more he was able to "dupe the crow."

Wałęsa is not excessively modest, and sometimes he even is prone to boasting. A particularly glaring example is his favorite saying, "I overthrew communism." But if we look for a grain of truth in this claim, it could be put like this: "This was a great victory of thousand-year-old peasant smarts over forty-year-old communist Machiavellianism." However, the assertion that Wałęsa ran Solidarity following SB directives is the most ridiculous idea of politically driven historiography in our time.

In Warsaw the general strike in response to the introduction of martial law was weak and encompassed relatively few factories. A small group of workers occupied the large production halls of the Ursus tractor factory, even if the entire workforce was ten thousand strong. The majority of the Warsaw factories did not stop work at all. The sight of tanks on the streets, the announcement about court-martials for strikers, the vandalized Union offices, the curfew, and soldiers warming themselves at coal-burning braziers on the empty streets—all the theatrics of war made a terrifying impression. But RaWar factory went on strike. This was an arms-producing factory; therefore it was chosen as one of the first to be pacified. A tank knocked down a wall, and fully armed ZOMO troopers in fatigues entered. They went to the production hall and faced the workers. The commandant turned to the strikers with an order, “Get out of here!” No response. Then the commandant ordered his troops, “Load your guns!” One after another the workers started to leave. They did not resist when they were IDed and escorted outside the gate.

This was a natural reaction of normal people. The determination of the powerless has its limits. Virtually everybody joins a general strike, whereas an insurrection is usually joined only by a small minority. In the situation described to me by a young RaWar worker, everybody surrendered. Of course, the struggle made no sense. Still, a person at gunpoint who stops defending himself because he has no chance to succeed will come out from such a trial a changed person. He knows he has given in against violence, and this knowledge is traumatic. The spirit of resistance has been broken and will remain vulnerable for a long time.

No nation consists exclusively of heroes. This includes Poland—contrary to the legends and school reading lists. And this is fine. A life only among heroes would not just be short but would be unbearable. I know because I happened to be in the company of people who were convinced of their own heroism. Heroism in real life usually leads to premature death on some or other field of glory, while the nation must live, produce and raise children, support families, build its welfare, and create its culture. Forced to make a dramatic choice, the men and women workers from Solidarity gave up fighting in defense of their Union because they wanted to survive and provide for their families. Even the relatively large number of Joans of Arc gave up. This was completely understandable, and not even dishonorable, but the revolution did not survive. The “war” changed the national spirit, and this could not be reversed. The spirit of those who against all odds decided to continue the resistance and who persevered over the next years changed as well. Their language changed together with their way of looking at reality, their value system, and their social networks. These changes were not always for the better.

Only a few factories and towns started a general strike in response to martial law. The places of resistance did not form a continuous continent but rather a scattered archipelago. Since August 1980 Solidarity's tactics was to lock themselves in the factories and under no circumstances take the protest to the streets. This enabled the pacification of the scattered resistance centers using relatively small but reliable and mobile ZOMO detachments. During these actions the army only supported the special militia detachments, mainly by tanks breaking the gates or walls surrounding the occupied factories.

But this swift and effective strike breaking did not occur everywhere. In some towns and industrial centers the strike resistance took the nature of a general strike and was stubbornly continued despite initial pacifications. Wrocław was such a Solidarity stronghold. I know it the best, therefore I will use it as an example to analyze the changes in the attitudes and ways of thinking by the groups with which I identified.

On Monday, December 14, all the large factories in Wrocław went on strike, as well as the smaller ones, even the ones about which Władysław Frasyniuk, who knew the city and the factory commissions, knew nothing. This many-thousands-strong strike was pacified by the seven-hundred-strong Maneuvering Battalion of the Militia Voivodship Headquarters. The Wrocławians called them "carolers" because they went factory to factory like carolers. They entered and removed the striking workers. The PaFaWag rail carriage factory was first on December 15. Its pacification was even more drastic than at the RaWar factory in Warsaw. The ZOMO troopers put their pistols to the heads of the arrested workers in order to force them to sign loyalty declarations.[87] Those who signed were released, and those who refused were taken to the militia precincts, where some were taken to the internment centers that were established in prisons. A statement of support for the "crow," the militia, and the army was added to the loyalty declaration that the workers in the Archimedes and other pacified factories were forced to sign. Outwardly this was just a scrap of paper, but signing it was humiliating. It violated one's dignity and squashed the will to resist. Despite this, after the pacifiers left, the strikes erupted anew. For this reason the army and the ZOMO had to pacify the Ponar lathe factory three times, as well as the Fadroma and Hutmen factories. After the pacification, strikes also were resumed in the PaFaWag and Dolmel factories. Three times the pacifying forces were unable to pass the ElWro factory gates, which were blocked by a live wall of women, and the army did not dare attack them.

The firm resistance of the Wrocław factories was due in no small measure to Władysław Frasyniuk, Józef Pinior, and Piotr Bednarz, who led the Regional Striking Committee.[88] Besides their obvious efficiency and courage, and the overall good organizational shape of the Lower Silesian Solidarity, above all the diverse and open makeup of the brave Wrocław community with its ability to cooperate determined the extent and ferocity of the resistance.

The struggle of the Wrocław factory workers was broken after about a week by the militarization of the factories and lockouts, that is, laying off the entire workforce and rehiring only those workers whom the police and management deemed loyal. In the People's Poland there were no private factories or free labor market, and under martial law being fired from a state-owned factory for striking was like being blacklisted. Such a person could not find employment. Hence the important role later played by military commissars in factories and secret police cells established within factory administrations.

After the suppression of the strikes, the Solidarity underground structures tried to sustain the workers' resistance by stopping work in factories for fifteen minutes on the thirteenth day of every month. The possible reasoning behind this was that such short protests would not bring in the ZOMO or prompt lockouts. But this was not a good idea. A momentary strike provided no security to those who stopped their machines. The factory supervisors could easily identify them, and the commissars and SB agents would decide who should be fired and deprived of their livelihood and who should be interned or arrested. The workers had no defense against these repressions. Just before the introduction of martial law, Józef Pinior managed to withdraw 80 million zlotys of union dues from the bank and hide the money with Cardinal Gulbinowicz.[89] Therefore the Wrocław underground had money to finance its activities and aid the repressed workers, but it was not able to provide for all the laid-off workers and their families indefinitely. Fear of repressions, anxiety about families, and the realization that the great strike against martial law had been crushed and did not manage to reach its goal began to undermine the resistance and disintegrate the Solidarity factory cells.

In the spring that was supposed to be “ours,” the resistance changed its character. Solidarity held street demonstrations on May 1 and 3 in Warsaw and in several other cities with large and rioting crowds—especially young people. There were skirmishes with the ZOMO. There were similar tumultuous demonstrations in June in Wrocław, particularly in the Fabryczna district. Militia vehicles were burned, and the ZOMO detachments had to turn back before the crowd more than once. This gave the street skirmish participants a feeling of revenge and the illusion of victory after the defeat of the strikes. But these Wrocław rallies were initiated not by the RKS but rather by the “Fighting Solidarity,” a radical dissenting movement that had parted ways with the underground Union structure.[90]

Considering the different situation between the factories and the streets, the Union underground called for a countrywide protest on the second anniversary of the Gdańsk Accord, that is, August 31, 1982. This time the Wrocław RKS put all its resources into preparing the demonstration. The result was impressive—at least fifty thousand people took to the Wrocław streets. They put up barricades and again forced the ZOMO to retreat. But an ElWro worker named Kazimierz Michalczyk was killed. In Lubin, a much smaller town than Wrocław but considered the capital of the copper industry, the ZOMO with complete premeditation killed the protesters. Michał Adamowicz, Mieczysław Poźniak, and Andrzej Trajkowski were shot by ZOMO bullets. The protests in Lubin lasted for another two days.

Smaller or larger demonstrations were held in many places in Poland on August 31, 1982, most prominently in Nowa Huta and Gdańsk. From that time, street demonstrations rather than strikes in factories became the principal weapon of the underground Solidarity. This was a very significant change, and it concerned not only the forms of the struggle but also its social mechanisms and ultimately the movement’s image. Although I was not aware of it at the time and I doubt anyone fully realized it, this was such an important and consequential collective experience that it deserves serious consideration even after many years.

On the surface, the change was only about tactics, and it was mainly prompted by a realistic assessment of the possibilities. The defeat of the December 1981 strikes resulted in the destruction or disorganization and serious weakening of the factory-level Union structures. The attitudes of the workers also were undergoing a deep traumatic change. The underground could no longer count on factories to respond to calls for strikes regardless of their consequences. It was much easier to call for street demonstrations. Therefore we need to consider the different social mechanisms of a sit-in strike on one hand and a street riot on the other.

Workers in a factory on strike become a collective actor. They are a cohesive social group that maintains daily contact and is connected with stable links. A strike requires this group to act as one person. But every husband or wife also must consider the risk to their families. A strike cannot succeed without a common determination that is difficult to achieve and maintain—it would not have the necessary support of the workers.

The collective actor in a street demonstration is the crowd. A crowd consists of individuals gathered ad hoc or for a purpose such as a mass. A crowd can be prone to strong emotions, especially when fighting with the police. But a crowd does not form a collective. When a demonstration ends, its participants depart or run away, and they are no longer connected to each other. One can feel loyalty toward the workers in one’s factory because they are a relatively stable group that one can refer to and take their interests into account. A crowd—except for the momentary integration during a street fight with police—has no common interests and is not a part of anyone’s identity. When a gathering place for protesters and a source of inspiration for many is a church and a priest celebrating mass, some protesters may in fact be members of that parish. However, not all will be parishioners, nor will the entire parish community be protesters. For those who were inclined to demonstrate on the streets, their political ties to the Solidarity underground were much more pronounced than their parish affiliations.

Such political ties once connected the underground and the factory workers who were inclined to strike, but these ties were organic and reciprocal. As the workers ceased to actively (that is, through strikes) support the Solidarity fighters who continued their resistance, the ties that once linked the Union activists with workers grew weaker. Important but rarely noticed and analyzed changes also occurred within the activists. Underground activity follows its own set of rules. Participants must protect themselves from being identified, discovered, and infiltrated by the enemy's agents. Conspiratorial activities naturally lead the conspirators to enclose themselves within their own circle. In addition, underground struggle combined with great personal risk creates strong emotional ties between cofighters. They mean more to each other than people outside of the fighting community. In extreme cases this leads to a dangerous feeling of superiority, as was expressed in this old legionnaire's song, "We could care less for your praise, tears, or purse."[91] While standing up for each other and joining arms in brotherhood, unbeknownst to themselves the underground fighters were turning their backs on their base.

This was not always the rule. The change in attitudes did not necessarily take such extreme forms. Yet Solidarity undoubtedly experienced a thorough change under martial law. The mass workers' movement organized as a trade union disappeared, and a cadre anticommunist organization emerged in its place. The banner was still the same, but it represented a different social content.

The language of "our" side also changed. Martial law made us assume the rhetoric of war as well. "Our" identity was now determined not as much by our social backgrounds as by the antagonism toward our mortal enemy. The idea that one could talk to the "crow" "Pole to Pole" was largely unthinkable for our warriors, especially as there was no possibility for serious negotiations.[92] Our language was based on excluding the opposing side from being "a Pole." "We" were the nation, while "they" were the occupier waging a war against the nation on Soviet orders. "Jaruzelski is a Soviet general in a Polish uniform," went the saying popularized by the American General Weinberger. But it was carried across the ocean by the Solidarity emigres from Poland.[93] Our side dusted off old anticommunist epithets from before 1939. *Precz z komuną* ["Down with communism"] was an obligatory chant at every Solidarity demonstration. Our attitude toward the word "socialism" also changed. In the summer of 1981 our bulletins vehemently denounced the accusation that we were an antisocialist force. This was not just lip service. Our press claimed quite seriously that the antisocialist force was the Party apparatus because it stood up against the working class (that is, against us). During martial law such rhetoric could no longer appear in our ranks. Even if "socialism" did not evoke as strong hostility as "communism" did, it was seen as a derisive epithet, and nobody tried to reclaim it.

A change in language is always connected with a change in thinking, and it signals a change in the hierarchy of values, or sometimes even a reversal. The great Solidarity of 1980–1981 was a collectivist, egalitarian, and in fact socialist movement. Two years after the introduction of martial law none of these epithets reflected the ideological makeup of the underground Solidarity. This applied to intellectuals as well, especially the economists who had served as Union advisors. Solidarity continued to be their reference point, or rather they looked toward what was left of it, but they spoke a different language and thought differently than in 1981 when they coedited the program "The Self-Governing Republic" during the Union's Congress.[94] Now their compasses pointed to different poles. The eyes of the Polish intelligentsia looked toward the West—but it was no longer the time of John Maynard Keynes and Willy Brandt but that of Milton Friedman, Margaret Thatcher, and Ronald Reagan. It was a time of neoliberalism in economic thought and neoconservatism in politics. The centers of neoliberal thought emerged at the fringes of Solidarity in Gdańsk and Kraków. Not only did the London-based Stanisław Gomułka assume the neoliberal perspective on the economy, but so did Leszek Balcerowicz, only recently an advisor for the Solidarity-affiliated "Network," and even Waldemar Kuczyński, who was Mazowiecki's deputy editor-in-chief of the *Solidarność* weekly. Soon this mode of thinking would dominate in Poland under the historical banner of Solidarity.

Andrzej Gwiazda was one of Wałęsa's three rivals for the post of Solidarity chairman at the First Congress in 1981. Now in free Poland we have parted ways, but I still wholeheartedly agree with his stump speech to the congress. He argued against those who disparaged people who care only about sausage and not about the freedom of speech. He also warned against excessive trust in the power of the ten-million-strong movement that was supposedly invincible. I quote his words from memory: "During the German occupation no more than 3 percent of adult Poles were involved in the Home Army, including the structures of the Underground State and clandestine education. When we face real danger, we will not be able to count on more than that. 98 percent of our people will leave us in the hour of our trial. However, we need to remember that we have created our Union expressly for those people, for the 98 percent who will abandon us in the time of peril.”

We remembered these words neither in our hour of trial when the military junta gripped our throats after suppressing the strikes nor later when history turned around and we were on top.

In December 1982 the authorities decided to “suspend” martial law while temporarily extending some of its important regulations. It was announced that all the internees would return home for Christmas. But there were some exceptions. On December 22 I was told to pack up and was taken from Białołęka to the MSW building. The military prosecutor presented me with the dangerous-sounding charge that I had participated in an attempt to overthrow the political system of the People’s Poland by force (Article 123 of the Penal Code) between August 1980 and December 1981. This same charge was presented to six other KK member internees: Andrzej Gwiazda, Marian Jurczyk, Jan Rulewski, Grzegorz Palka, Seweryn Jaworski, and Andrzej Rozpłochowski. We were handed arrest warrants and taken across the street to the Third Unit of the Mokotów prison. I remained there until August 6, 1984.

I did not waste this time in terms of my professional life. At the end of the 1970s I was working on a book commissioned by the PAN Institute of History on peasant life in Poland during the Piast dynasty.[95] It was to be the initial volume in the series *Peasants in Polish Society*. I had managed to gather and analyze the materials, and I was ready to start writing when the Solidarity revolution erupted. For me there was nothing more important than working for the Union. The Middle Ages could wait. Over the next sixteen months I only wrote proclamations, declarations, and resolutions. I was not even able to prepare the paper on the structures of society and princely administration in tenth- to thirteenth-century Poland that I was supposed to deliver in Italian at an international conference in Spoleto in April 1982. General Jaruzelski’s declaration of martial law pushed me back to my professional work. Of course I could not go to Italy, but someone else could deliver my paper. In Białołęka I did not have access to all my professional tools, but I had time, the will, paper and pen, and my book *Organizacja gospodarcza państwa piastowskiego*.[96] I had brought it to the KK meeting to give to Zbigniew Bujak, but I was not able to do so. Now it turned out to be useful. I was in a two-person cell with Seweryn Jaworski, who understood my need to focus. He even made a rough oil lamp out of a jam tin, using string from the government-provided long johns as a wick and lard as fuel, so that I could write after the light was turned off. He had worked as a metallurgist in the Huta Warszawa, and he was handy with such technical wizardry.

In a few weeks my paper was ready. I handwrote two copies, just in case. I submitted one to the prison administration to be censored and delivered to PAN chair Professor Aleksander Gieysztor, who was going to the Spoleto conference with a group of Polish scholars. As expected, the prison authorities did not pass my text to the recipient with the excuse that they did not know Italian. But I did not wait. I took the other copy to Sunday mass in the prison common room. I said I wanted to make confession, and inside the improvised confessional I handed the manuscript to the young Jesuit whom we endearingly called Andrzejek. He tucked it under his cassock, easily carried it out of the prison, and gave it to Professor Gieysztor. A week later Professor Girolamo Arnaldi read my paper at the conference, and a few days after that (still before the end of the conference) Rev. Bronisław Dembowski (today a bishop) told me with satisfaction that my paper was well received. At that time telephones were either disconnected or ostentatiously wiretapped, so it seemed as if the Holy Ghost himself was serving as a carrier pigeon for the priests. In any case, the clergy had good information.

My paper contained a general outline of my intended book. But in order to write it in prison I needed the source materials that I had gathered before August 1980 and a number of books. Both these things had been brought to me in Białołęka before I was moved to Mokotów. The wardens at Rakowiecka Street did not question what I carried in with me; apparently I was permitted to have the same things in Mokotów that I had in Białołęka. I could start writing without any disruption. Now I was in a cell with Wojciech Dobrzyński, who suffered in silence when I wrote. He was a compulsive editor of an underground bulletin, and his only demand was that every evening I read to him what I had written during the day and listen to his editorial advice. Our cell had no loudspeaker. I was seldom interrogated, as the officers did not have much hope for success. As someone who was "temporarily arrested" (even if practically this meant locked up indefinitely), I had the right to unlimited correspondence. When I was missing a document, I wrote to my fellow medievalists asking them to send me the text in a letter. Colonel Szczęsny of the Head Office of the Military Prosecutor, who was my prison censor, was full of ill will. As a rule he did not permit additional books to be delivered. But luckily he also had human flaws. He was vain and full of complaints and did not want to appear as if he did not know Latin or the professional tools of a medievalist. He immediately passed me the letters with Latin text and information on sources, whereas he withheld every letter from my family for weeks. I also think the *genius loci*, otherwise gloomy, was auspicious for me in that "Palace of Wonders" that by then I knew like the palm of my hand. In any case, in less than a year my book manuscript was ready. But Colonel Szczęsny refused to allow me to send it to Professor Janusz Tazbir, who was the director of the Institute of History, or even to Professor Gieysztor, despite official requests from both of them. So I copied the text with tiny handwriting into an exercise book and wrote *Retenta adwokackie* on the cover.[97] I took it to a visit with my favorite legal councilor, Ewa Pruchniewicz, who passed the manuscript to the Institute of History. In this way, one copy was safe.

My book appeared in 1987. I think it is a good book, and I give it second place in my personal ranking of my works. The first place undoubtedly belongs to *Barbarzyńska Europa*, published in 2004.[98] Colonel Szczęsny's premonition that I might be put up for a professorship for a book on peasants proved to be correct. In 1988 the Institute of History initiated the process, and in 1990 President Wojciech Jaruzelski bestowed on me the title of professor.

In addition to this indisputable scholarly accomplishment from my last (for the time being) stay in the Mokotów prison, I can also take credit for a political accomplishment. This consisted of the simple refusal to leave that place. It is about the famous but overly mythologized case of an offer made in the spring of 1984 to the so-called eleven, that is, the four KOR members and seven KK members imprisoned with the charge of attempting to overthrow the system. Two very unreliable memos from the MSW Bureau of Investigations have survived and some personal accounts of uneven value. Undoubtedly Bronisław Geremek’s account is the most accurate and insightful.[99] However, I think my vantage point also may be useful.[100]

In February or March 1984 I read a short note in *Trybuna Ludu* about government spokesman Jerzy Urban’s press conference. He informed foreign journalists, and in turn *Trybuna Ludu* was informing its readers, that the eleven prisoners from KOR and the KK were supposedly given the option to temporarily leave Poland for abroad instead of facing the court.

I think on April 20, 1984—I remember it was Good Friday—a barber came to our cell to shave only me. Afterward the ward supervisor examined my outfit critically and asked if I had anything more presentable. I did not. Then Lieutenant Breitkopf of the MSW Bureau of Investigations took me to the prison yard. When I asked, “Where are we heading?” he answered simply, “You’ll see.” I was put in a civilian van together with Jan Rulewski and an escort of armed plainclothes agents. Jan turned to me (apparently counting on my experience) with the same question. Considering the day, I responded, “Probably to the blessing of the Easter baskets.”

But no clergy were waiting for us in the fancy villa in Chylice (the same one where Wałęsa was held at the beginning of martial law), just our advisors: Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Bronisław Geremek, Andrzej Wielowieyski, Jan Olszewski, Wiesław Chrzanowski, Andrzej Stelmachowski, and Aleksander Gieysztor. Gieysztor apparently was in a different role, as he was not a Solidarity advisor; perhaps he was there for me. The KOR members who were at large—Józef Rybicki, Jan Józef Lipski, Aniela Steinsbergowa, Maria Wosiek, and Rev. Jan Zieja—were meeting with the imprisoned KOR members in a similar villa in Otwock. The last and decisive meeting between all “eleven,” the Union advisors, and the KOR members who were at large took place on May 12, 1984, in Chylice.

Their proposal was no longer to leave the country for a few years. Instead they proposed to release us from prison and close the investigation in exchange for us to write a letter to the Primate in which we would promise to “abstain from any and all public activities, social or political” for two and a half years. An appendix that the bishops and the generals had negotiated explained what was understood by “public activities, social or political.” It was tantamount to a loyalty oath, except that we were to give it to the Church rather than directly to the generals. Should we decide to do it, the authorities would not only immediately send us home but also consider general amnesty for all political prisoners. Our first impression was so strong that Jan Rulewski said to me in a low voice, “This is an alliance between a baton and a crosier.” I would not have dared to put it so bluntly, but I am an atheist whereas Rulewski is a good Catholic, so he could do it.

We were taken to Chylice three or four times. At our second meeting we learned that Adam Michnik refused to leave his cell to meet with the other KOR members. Nor would he talk to Jan Józef Lipski, who came to see him in Mokotów. Jacek Kuroń was brought to Michnik’s cell, and they argued so loudly that their yells were heard all over the corridors. The advisors decided to turn to me. The warden took me to the interrogation room where Captain Fonfara handed me a letter from the lawyer Wiesław Chrzanowski (written on the stationery of the Polish episcopate) with the request that I talk to Michnik “to find out why he was refusing to take part in the meetings of the ‘eleven.’” I agreed, and I was taken to Adam’s cell. His rat cellmate was tactfully moved out. During our conversation Adam did not throw a tantrum. He calmly stated, “One who is incarcerated does not negotiate.” This was inaccurate because nobody was negotiating with us. All we could do was to accept or reject the offer that had been negotiated between the bishops and the generals; and we discussed it between ourselves and with our advisors, and not with the authorities. To explain his position further, Adam read me his famous (then unknown to me) letter to Kiszczak.[101] The letter concerned the temporary exile, which was not what we were offered in Chylice. Still, it left no doubt that the author would not give the generals (through the bishops) any promise to behave himself. In this there were no differences between Adam and me. The difference was pure chance—his fiancée had informed him during a visit what was going on, therefore he was the only one who knew where and why they wanted to take him. Because of this he refused to leave his cell. In addition we differed in our attitudes toward the group. I cared that the “eleven” as a whole reject the proposal, something that required—so I thought—a discussion. Adam seemingly cared only about his reputation. It was as if he was saying, sell yourselves out if you wish, but don’t count on me. This was an effective way to put pressure on his friends from KOR.

At the same time we were taken to Chylice, the MSW tried another small distraction. We were led (separately of course) to the attorney’s visiting room at the Mokotów prison where, instead of our lawyers, we met Emilio de Olivares, the executive assistant to the UN Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar.[102] He was accompanied by a translator, supposedly from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Emilio de Olivares returned to the proposal already abandoned by the Church, that is, the offer to be sent abroad for a year or two. He spoke decent Italian, and in conversation with me we did not need a translator. He assured me that after a year or two we would be permitted to return to Poland. I firmly refused, as did all the others. Besides, it was clear this was a distraction aimed at the Church, and I think his proposal was unacceptable also to those of us who would not dare to refuse the Primate. It remains an MSW Bureau of Investigations secret why they wrote a confidential memo to their own supervisors claiming, contrary to the truth, that we all were considering the option to temporarily leave Poland.

All “eleven” met in Chylice on May 12, 1984. Actually there were nine because Michnik was absent on principle and Jurczyk was in the hospital. The KK advisors, as well as Jan Józef Lipski, Józef Rybicki, and Maria Wosiek of KOR, were also present. We discussed how we should respond to the Primate. I declared that I would not sign a letter to the Primate if it contained a promise to refrain from activities, even if the majority of the “eleven” thought otherwise. I justified this with political and legal arguments. It was in the interest of the government and not ours to avoid a trial. We were jailed under a false accusation, and the evidence had been concocted in the course of the investigation. The intention of the authorities was to weaken the underground both morally and politically. We were important role models for the people who continued to struggle for the return of Solidarity at great personal risk. Giving in would be a serious blow to these people. I was completely nonplussed by the argument made by two of our advisors that our release was a precondition of the West to include Poland in the International Monetary Fund program, and because of this we should make a "sacrifice" (?!) for our country in the time of crisis. I did not understand why Poland's participation in the IMF was of any value, moreover of such value that we should sacrifice our loyalty toward our underground colleagues and our own reputations. Besides, I did not believe that if we gave in, the generals would grant amnesty to all the other political prisoners, as this promise was rather vague in the letter we had seen from the head of the Council of State to the Primate.

Jacek Kuroń, Zbigniew Romaszewski, and Henryk Wujec held similar opinions. The advisors' positions varied. Józef Rybicki emphatically advocated accepting the proposal, and Jan Olszewski and Wiesław Chrzanowski tried to influence Jaworski, Rulewski, Palka, and Rozpłochowski in a similar direction. Jan Józef Lipski maintained a visible distance, and the other advisors evidently avoided any declaration that might look like lobbying. In the end we had a secret ballot. There were three choices, "yes," "no," and "res." (signaling reservations on the proposal). Because we could either accept or reject the proposal, voting "res." really meant abstention. It was no secret how we voted. Kuroń, Romaszewski, Wujec, Gwiazda, and I voted against promising that we would behave ourselves, and our four colleagues (Rulewski, Jaworski, Palka, and Rozpłochowski) abstained. It remains a mystery of the MSW Bureau of Investigations by what miracle its memo turned this result into three votes "no" (all the KOR members) and seven votes "yes" (all the KK members, including Marian Jurczyk, who was not present). With such underlings and information there was no way General Kiszczak could win.

But we needed to reply to the Primate in writing. As usual, the unrewarding task of drafting the response fell to me. I had to write something acceptable for both those who voted against the offer and those who abstained. We also needed to placate the anger of the Church. We were protected within thick prison walls, but Zbigniew Bujak and the TKK, even if they rejoiced in our refusal, nonetheless needed the support of the bishops rather than their wrath. Pressured by these contradictory requirements, I wrote a peculiar text—an oily rejection. We all signed it.

But when I read our now common letter out loud, Wielowieyski groaned, “Goodness gracious, what did you write? It is so convoluted. It is meant for simple people—bishops!”

NOTES

1. Trans. FLV.
2. The author uses a phrase from the Polish lyrics for the “Internationale.” The English translations of the original French text do not have a phrase that conveys this meaning, therefore the phrase is translated word for word.
3. Karol Modzelewski, *Organizacja gospodarcza państwa Piastowskiego X-XIII wiek* (Wrocław: Zakład narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1975).
4. Instytut Historii Kultury Materialnej PAN, and Eleonora Tabaczyńska, *Italia* (Wrocław [u.a.]: Ossolineum, 1980).
5. Karol Modzelewski, “La transizione dall’antichità al feudalesimo,” in *Storia d'Italia*. *Annali 1*, *Dal feudalesimo al capitalismo* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi, 1978), 3–109.
6. Karol Modzelewski and Czesław Madajczyk, *Chłopi w społeczeństwie polskim*, 1 1 (Wrocław: Zakład im. Ossolińskich, 1987).
7. The Polish Teachers’ Union (Polish: Związek Nauczycielstwa Polskiego, ZNP), established in 1905, is the largest Polish trade union and professional association for teachers and educators. Before Solidarity, the most noticeable activity of communist trade unions was organizing employer’s vacations in an extensive network of retreats and holiday centers.
8. It was a wave of strikes in Mielec, Poznań, Lublin, Świdnik, Chełm, Warsaw, and Żyrardów, among others. They preceded the strike in Gdańsk that started on August 14, 1980.
9. Henryka Krzywonos-Stycharska (b. 1953) is a tram driver and opposition activist turned politician.
10. Solidarity strike (Polish: strajk solidarnościowy) is a strike declared by a strong group of workers (such as workers in a large factory) on behalf of a weaker group or a group that cannot stop work (such as emergency workers) to press for the implementation of their demands.
11. Bronisław Geremek (1932–2008) was a medieval historian and politician. He was considered a leading figure in the Polish democratic

opposition. An advisor to the MKS in Gdańsk during the August 1980 strikes and then to the legal and underground Solidarity, he was one of the architects of the Round Table negotiations.

12. The Society for Scholarly Courses (Polish: Towarzystwo Kursów Naukowych, TKN) was established in 1978 to offer college-level lectures on topics absent or prohibited in universities. These lectures were held at private apartments; they were called "the Flying University" (Polish: Latający Uniwersytet) after a similar educational enterprise active in Warsaw between 1885 and 1905. The TKN also published scholarly brochures and provided stipends to students. "Experience and Future" (Polish: Konserwatorium "Doświadczenie i Przyszłość," DiP) was an informal discussion club and think tank active in 1978–1982. It bought together both independent intellectuals and reformist Party members.

13. Tadeusz Kowalik (1926–2012) was an economist and social activist.

14. The appeal of August 20, 1980, signed by sixty-four prominent Warsaw intellectuals, called on the authorities to negotiate with the striking workers. For the text, see http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,2848015.html . The letter was delivered to the striking Gdańsk Shipyard on August 22 by Bronisław Geremek and Tadeusz Mazowiecki, who then started to assemble the Commission of Advisors that was officially established on August 24.

15. Zbigniew Romaszewski (1940–2014), a physicist by training, was a human rights activist and conservative politician. As a member of KOR he created and ran together with his wife, Zofia Romaszewska (b. 1940), the Intervention Bureau (Polish: Biuro Interwencji KSS "KOR") to document human rights violations and aid the victims. Józef Śreniowski (b. 1947) is a sociologist; he was one of the members of KOR.

16. Occupational Safety and Health (Polish: bezpieczeństwo i higiena pracy, BHP).

17. Konrad Bieliński (b. 1949) is a mathematician; he was a member of KOR.

18. Dariusz Fikus (1932–1996) was a journalist.

19. Kazimierz Barcikowski (1927–2007) was a politician and Party activist; in 1980 he served as a deputy prime minister.

20. Andrzej Friszke, *Rewolucja Solidarności 1980–1981* (Kraków: Znak Horyzont, 2014).

21. The author refers to the “Resolution of the Council of State of September 13, 1980, on the Registration of the Newly Formed Trade Unions” (“Uchwała Rady Państwa z dnia 13 września 1980 r. w sprawie rejestracji nowo powstających związków zawodowych”; see the text: http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WMP19800220104/O/M19800104.pdf).
22. Lech Kaczyński (1949–2010) was a lawyer and politician. He served as president of Poland from 2005 until his death in a plane crash in Smolensk. He was Jarosław Kaczyński’s twin brother. Cf. chapter 9, note 48.
23. Joanna Duda-Gwiazda (b. 1939) is a shipbuilding engineer and opposition activist. She is the wife of Andrzej Gwiazda.
24. Zbigniew Bujak (b. 1954) is a factory worker turned union activist and politician. He was the head of the Mazowsze Region in 1980–1981. After the introduction of martial law he was the chair of the clandestine regional Interim Executive Commission (TKW) and was in hiding between 1981 and 1986. Lech Dymarski (b. 1949) is a poet and opposition and local government activist.
25. Wiesław Chrzanowski (1923–2012) was a lawyer and conservative politician.
26. The Central Council of Trade Unions (Polish: Centralna Rada Związków Zawodowych, CRZZ) was the officially approved federation of communist trade unions. It existed between 1944 and 1980.
27. Lech Bądkowski (1920–1984) was a novelist and translator from Kashubian as well as a journalist and social and political activist.
28. Józef Pińkowski (1929–2000) was an economist and communist politician. He served as prime minister from September 1980 to February 1981.
29. Andrzej Słowik (b. 1949) was a driver for public transportation in Łódź. He became the head of the Łódź region of Solidarity.
30. Jerzy Bafia (1926–1991) was a lawyer and communist politician. He served as Minister of Justice between 1976 and 1981.
31. “Sport” cigarettes (Polish: *sporty*) were the cheapest Polish brand of nonfilter cigarettes. They were often smoked inserted in a short glass holder called *fifka* or *lufka*, sometimes half a cigarette at a time.
32. The phrase “working people of town and country” is taken from Article 14 of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Poland, 1952. Cf.

http://libr.sejm.gov.pl/tek01/txt/kpol/e1952a-r2.html.

33. Party “concrete” (Polish: *beton*) was a term used for the rightist faction in the Party.

34. Stanisław Ciosek (b. 1939) is a communist politician and diplomat. He served as the Secretary of the Jelenia Góra Voivodship Party Committee (1975–1980), Minister for the Trade Unions (1980–1985), and Ambassador of Poland to the Soviet Union and Russia (1989–1996).

35. Władysław Frasyniuk (b. 1954) is one of the most recognizable characters in Solidarity. A bus driver turned union activist and politician, he was the chairman of the Lower Silesia region of the Union from its inception until the Round Table Negotiations in 1989.

36. *Jedność* (“Unity”) was the Solidarity weekly in Szczecin. It was published from August 24, 1980, initially as a bulletin in the striking Szczecin Shipyard, and then as an internal Union publication. In January 1981 it was the first Solidarity press title to be distributed in official circulation.

37. *Tygodnik Solidarność* (“Solidarity Weekly”) was published between April and December 1981 as a large-circulation paper (five hundred thousand copies), censored and officially distributed, with Tadeusz Mazowiecki as its editor-in-chief. Disbanded during martial law, it was reactivated in June 1989.

38. Piotr Sapełło worked in the printing shop of the General Prosecutor’s Office and therefore had access to the copies of the document prepared for distribution.

39. Wiesława Bardon (1927–2016) was one of the most infamous public prosecutors. Complacent toward the authorities and the SB, she was a prosecutor in political trials between the 1960s and 1990.

40. Jan Narożniak (b. 1950) is a mathematician, underground printer, and opposition activist. During martial law in 1982, he was wounded while trying to escape arrest and then rescued from the hospital in one of the most spectacular actions of the underground Solidarity.

41. Huta Warszawa was a steelworks producing upgraded steel; it was located in the northern part of Warsaw. Built in the 1950s, it was one of the largest Warsaw factories, employing around ten thousand workers.

42. Stefan Bratkowski (b. 1934) is a prominent journalist; he chaired the Polish Journalists Association from 1980 to its dissolution in 1982 during

martial law and then from its reactivation in 1989 to 1990.

43. Ryszard Kukliński (1930–2004) was a colonel in the Polish General Staff who between 1972 and 1981 passed to the CIA approximately thirty-five thousand pages of top secret Warsaw Pact documents, including details of the plan to introduce martial law. Shortly before its imposition he and his family were spirited out of Poland by the CIA. A controversial figure, he was sentenced in absentia to death as a traitor (after the fall of communism the sentence was commuted to twenty-five years in prison), but eventually the sentence was nullified. After death, Kukliński was laid to rest in the Allee of the Distinguished at the Warsaw Military Cemetery and posthumously promoted to general.

44. The conference proceedings were published in Nina Smolar, ed., *Wejdą nie wejdą: Polska 1980–1982: wewnętrzny kryzys, międzynarodowe uwarunkowania: konferencja w Jachrance, listopad 1997* (London: Aneks, 1999).

45. Zbigniew Brzeziński (1928–2017) was a Polish-American diplomat and political scientist; he served as President Jimmy Carter's National Security Advisor from 1977 to 1981. Richard Pipes (1923–2018) was a Polish-American scholar who specialized in Russian history; he was a member of the US National Security Council. Jan Nowak-Jeziorański (1914–2005) was a Polish journalist. A resistance fighter during World War II, he was an emissary shuttling between the Polish government-in-exile in London and the Home Army commanders in Poland. He was a longtime director (1952–1975) of the Polish Section of Radio Free Europe and an advisor to the American National Security Agency. General William Odom (1932–2008) was the assistant chief of staff for intelligence in the US Army (1981–1985) and director of the NSA between 1985 and 1988.

46. General Florian Siwicki (1925–2013) was a politician and career military officer and member of the Party Politburo. He served as Minister of Defense in General Jaruzelski's government in the 1980s.

47. Jerzy Buzek (b. 1940) served as prime minister between 1997 and 2001, first heading a right-centrist coalition government of the AWS and Freedom Union and then the right-wing AWS minority government.

48. Marshal Viktor Kulikov (1921–2013) was the commander-in-chief of the Warsaw Pact armed forces between 1977 and 1989. General Anatoly Gribkov (1919–2008) was the chief of staff of the Warsaw Pact armed

forces and a member of the Soviet Central Committee. Georgy Shakhnazarov (1924–2001) was a Soviet-Armenian politician and politician scientist, one of the closest aides to Gorbachev.

49. On September 17, 1939, the Soviet Union joined the German assault on Poland that started World War II; in Poland this attack is commonly referred to as a "stab in the back." The Soviets invaded Finland on November 30, 1939.

50. *Żołnierz Wolności* ("The Freedom Soldier") was the official daily of the Polish Army published between 1943 and 1991.

51. The "Message to the Workers of Eastern Europe" (Polish: "Posłanie do ludzi pracy Europy Wschodniej") was a document adopted by the Solidarity congress during the first part of its proceedings. It called the workers in the Eastern Bloc to struggle for the right to freely unionize, and therefore it was considered politically provocative.

52. Andrzej Celiński (b. 1950) is an opposition activist and socialist politician.

53. The Independent Trade Union of Individual Farmers Solidarity (Polish: Niezależny Samorządny Związek Rolników Indywidualnych Solidarność, NSZZ-RI "S").

54. A reference to the romantic drama *The Un-Divine Comedy* by Zygmunt Krasiński in which the trenches of Holy Trinity Castle are the last defense line of the aristocracy—a symbol of reactionary conservatism.

55. The "eleven" (Polish: *jedenastka*) was a popular name for the team of delegates of the eleven largest regions established at the KKP meeting on November 19, 1980. It met a day before the scheduled KPP meetings to prepare the agenda, drafts of resolutions, and so forth. (*Encyklopedia "Solidarności,"* http://www.encysol.pl/wiki/Krajowa_Komisja_Porozumiewawcza,_Komisja_Krajowa_NSZZ_"Solidarność".)

56. An allusion to *Rota* ("The Oath"); see chapter 1, note 64.

57. Andrzej Wielowieyski (b. 1927) is a lawyer, politician, and Catholic activist. Bohdan Cywiński (b. 1939) is an author and historian of ideas. His 1971 book *Rodowoody niepokornych* (*Genealogies of the Defiant Ones*) was among the defining readings for the opposition of the 1970s and 1980s.

58. Dietines (Polish: *sejmiki*, a diminutive of *sejm*) were regional assemblies of the nobility in medieval and early modern Poland between the fifteenth

and eighteenth centuries.
59. Marshal Dmitry Ustinov (1908–1984) was the Soviet Minister of Defense between 1976 and his death. Yuri Andropov (1904–1984) was the chairman of the KGB between 1967 and 1982 when he served as the general secretary of the CPSU until his death.
60. Roman Zimand (1926–1992) was a literary critic and literary historian.
61. The author is referring to General Jaruzelski's oft-repeated comment that declaring martial law was a lesser of two evils.
62. In the 1980s Bumar Group (Polish: Zjednoczenie Bumar) was a large corporation governing construction, manufacturing, and trade in military equipment.
63. Strike readiness (Polish: *gotowość strajkowa*) is a warning that workers in a factory are about to go on strike if their demands are not met or negotiated; it consists of leafleting the workplace and wearing armbands while working, among other things.
64. The Network of the Solidarity Factory Organizations of Leading Enterprises (Polish: Sieć Organizacji Zakładowych NSZZ Solidarność Wiodących Zakładów Pracy, or Sieć) was an extra-statutory structure composed of Union delegates from the eighteen largest Polish factories (one factory per one pre-1975 administrative reform voivodship). The Network served a consulting role for the Countrywide Commission (http://www.encysol.pl/wiki/Sieć_Organizacji_Zakładowych_NSZZ_„Solidarność”).
65. The Warsaw School of Economics (Polish: Skoła Główna Handlowa, SGH) is the oldest and most respected business school in Poland. After World War II it was renamed the Main School of Planning and Statistics, abbreviated SGPiS; it returned to its original name after the fall of communism.
66. *Point de rêveries*, *messieurs*, the words of Tsar Alexander II (who was also the king of Poland) to the Poles who had hoped for the restoration of Poland's independence in 1856.
67. Karol Małcużyński (1922–1984) was a journalist and politician. He was one of a handful of non-Party-affiliated representatives in the 1980–1984 Sejm.
68. The first Solidarity congress proceeded in Gdańsk in two sessions: from September 5 to 10, and from September 26 to October 7, 1981. This was

necessitated by the need to ratify at the local level the amendments to the Union bylaws.

69. Jacek Kuroń, *Gwiezdny czas: “Wiary i winy” dalszy ciąg* (London: Aneks, 1991).

70. “Who, whom?” (Russian: *кто кого?* Kto kogo?) was a slogan/principle formulated by Lenin in 1921. During the All-Russian Congress of Political Education Departments on October 17, 1921, Lenin supposedly said, “*Весь вопрос—кто кого опередит?*” (“The real question is—who will overtake whom?”).

71. The Committee for the Defense of the Country (Polish: Komitet Obrony Kraju, KOK) was established in 1959 as a permanent backup structure ready to assume full executive power in the situation of a direct threat to the statehood. It comprised the top Party, military, and governmental officials, and it oversaw the defense committees at the voivodship level.

72. Jerzy Urban (b. 1933) is a journalist. He worked for the weekly *Po Prostu* between 1955 and 1957; from 1961 he worked for the weekly *Polityka* under the editorship of Mieczysław F. Rakowski; between 1981 and 1989 he was a government spokesman.

73. On October 13, 1981, the workers of the state-owned agricultural corporation near Zielona Góra went on strike because the factory Solidarity head was laid off. The strike spread to the entire Zielona Góra region but was not supported by Solidarity in other parts of the country. On November 13, in response to an appeal by the KK, the strike was suspended without conclusive results.

74. The strike in the Radom College of Engineering (Polish: Wyższa Szkoła Inżynierska) was the longest strike in pre-martial-law Poland; it lasted from October 26 to December 13, 1981. The direct cause was the appointment of Party nominee Professor Michał Hebda (b. 1929) as rector that violated selection procedures and excluded representatives from Solidarity and the independent student union NZS.

75. The strike in Żyrardów was held between October 12 and November 4, 1981.

76. This strike was held on October 28, 1981.

77. “Final struggle” is a phrase from *The Internationale*.

78. For Polish republics, see chapter 3, note 26.

79. “Moro” was the popular name of combat uniforms of soldiers, firemen, and militiamen coined from the Polish name for the camouflage print on the fabric.

80. The “eleven” prisoners (not to be confused with the “eleven” heads of the largest regions, cf. chapter 7, note 55) were the former members of KOR, Jacek Kuroń, Adam Michnik, Zbigniew Romaszewski, and Henryk Wujec, and the members of the Solidarity KK, Andrzej Gwiazda, Seweryn Jaworski, Marian Jurczyk, Karol Modzelewski, Grzegorz Palka, Andrzej Rozpłochowski, and Jan Rulewski. In the fall of 1982, those who were interned at the beginning of martial law and who had not been released previously were released by the decree suspending martial law. However, these eleven had their legal status changed from interned to arrested and were retroactively charged with an organized attempt at overthrowing the political system in the People’s Poland by force (Article 123 of the Penal Code). Eventually, they were released by the July 1984 amnesty (http://www.encysol.pl/wiki/Sprawa_uwolnienia_
“jedenastki”).

81. “Isolation centers” (Polish: *ośrodki odosobnienia*) was the euphemistic term for internment camps in the official bureaucratic lingo.

82. The Oleksy case, or the “Olin affair,” refers to the accusation by Minister of Internal Affairs Andrzej Milczanowski in the Sejm in December 1995 that Prime Minister Józef Oleksy had collaborated with Russian agents in Poland as a spy under the code name “Olin.” As a result, Oleksy resigned and his government collapsed. “Olin’s” identity was never established, and the affair was possibly a Russian provocation to block Poland’s accession to NATO.

83. The fifth former member of KOR, Jan Lityński, was furloughed from prison in June 1983 and went underground. Therefore he is not counted among the “eleven.” He remained in hiding until October 1986.

84. Jacek Kuroń, “Macie teraz złoty róg,” *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, May 1, 1982. The title alludes to the golden horn from the play by Stanisław Wyspiański, *Wesele* (*The Wedding*), which symbolizes the call for a national insurrection.

85. The contemptuous nickname “crow” (Polish: *wrona*) was a slight modification of the abbreviation of the junta’s official name, the Military

Council of National Salvation (Polish: Wojskowa Rada Ocalenia Narodowego, or WRON).

86. Sławomir Cenckiewicz and Piotr Gontarczyk, *SB a Lech Wałęsa: przyczynek do biografii* (Gdańsk: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej. Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni Przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, 2008).

87. These written declarations, mockingly called *lojalka*, stated that the signatory has agreed to cease any further anticommunist activity and uphold the existing rule of law. Signing this document was not legally binding.

88. Józef Pinior (b. 1955) is a lawyer and politician. In 1981, as the financial officer of the Wrocław regional Solidarity board, a few days before the introduction of martial law, he managed to hide eighty million zlotys of the Union's money to save it from being confiscated. Piotr Bednarz (1949–2009) was a metalworker in the Dolmel factory and a member of the Wrocław regional Solidarity board.

89. Cardinal Henryk Gulbinowicz (1923–2020) was the Archbishop of Wrocław between 1976 and 2004.

90. Fighting Solidarity (Polish: Solidarność Walcząca, SW) was a radical Solidarity splinter organization established in June 1982 by Kornel Morawiecki as a response to the delegalization of Solidarity. The SW openly declared its anticommunism and called for the full independence of Poland and other communist-ruled nations and the reunification of Germany. The SW did not condone violence or terrorism.

91. From the song "My, Pierwsza Brygada" ("We Are the First Brigade"), also known as "Marsz Pierwszej Brygady" ("The March of the First Brigade") and "Legiony to żołnierska nuta" ("The Legions Are a Soldiers' Song"), one of the best-known songs of the Polish Legions formed by Józef Piłsudski during World War I.

92. "To reach a deal Pole to Pole" (Polish: "Dogadać się jak Polak z Polakiem") is a common phrase. It was used by Lech Wałęsa at the signing of the Gdańsk Accord on August 31, 1981.

93. Caspar Weinberger (1917–2006) was the Secretary of Defense in President Reagan's administration between 1981 and 1987.

94. *The Self-Governing Republic* (Polish: *Samorządna Rzeczpospolita*) was the final programmatic document of the First Congress of Solidarity, adopted on October 7, 1981.

95. Karol Modzelewski, *Chłopi w monarchii wczesnopiastowskiej* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich, 1987).

96. See chapter 7, note 3.

97. Lit. “*Attorney’s notes*,” an obscure Latin term suggesting lawyers’ lingo, which the author used in order to confuse his jailers.

98. Karol Modzelewski, *Barbarzyńska Europa* (Warszawa: Iskry, 2004). English translation: Karol Modzelewski, *Barbarian Europe* (New York: Peter Lang, 2015).

99. “Notatka protokolarna z rozmowy Zespołu Dobrych Usług z ‘jedenastką,’” *Wolność i Solidarność* 4 (2012).

100. *Wolność i Solidarność* no. 4 (2012) contains a group of materials on the negotiations concerning the release of the “eleven” in 1983 and 1984; among them is the text by Bronisław Geremek, “Doradcy i więźniowie” (“The Experts and the Prisoners,” 113–30) and a series of documents, including “Notatka protokolarna z rozmowy Zespołu Dobrych Usług z ‘jedenastką’ 12 maja 1984 r” (“Draft Minutes from the Talks between the Team for Meritorious Services and the ‘Eleven’ on May 12, 1984,” 133–39), as well as other documents, including several reports from the MSW Bureau of Investigations. *Wolność i Solidarność*, no. 4 (2012): 104–52, https://issuu.com/kuzbein/docs/wis_nr.4_issuu, accessed November 2, 2018.

101. This letter, first published in *Tygodnik Mazowsze* 73 (1984), has been reprinted multiple times in Poland. For an English translation, see Adam Michnik, Maya Latynski, Czesław Miłosz, and Jonathan Schnell, *Letters from Prison: And Other Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 64–70.

102. Javier Felipe Ricardo Pérez de Cuéllar de la Guerra (1920–2020) of Peru served as the United Nations’ Secretary General between 1982 and 1991.

Chapter 8

Postwar

> Everything's back as it should be—
> The landscape—a table freshly scrubbed,
> Below the red rag of the sky
> There's nothing but mud . . .
> —Jacek Kaczmarski, *The Flood*[1]

My friend Władysław Frasyniuk was among the very first Union leaders released by the July 1984 amnesty. He was the chair of the Lower Silesia Regional Board of Solidarity. From December 14, 1981, he led the Wrocław Regional Striking Committee (RKS). The SB managed to trace and arrest him on October 5, 1982, and on November 24, a Wrocław court sentenced him to six years in prison. I think the MSW ignored their own agents' reports about Frasyniuk's behavior in the underground, as well as the wardens' reports about his conduct in prison. Władek grew up in the so-called Bermuda triangle. This was a neighborhood in Wrocław between the main railway station and Traugutta and Krakowska streets. The nickname came from the fact that police cruisers that strayed there would disappear like planes in the Bermuda triangle. Frasyniuk came from a respectable family. He graduated from an automotive technical high school and was one of the best bus drivers for the City Transportation Authority (MPK). But his neighborhood taught him how to act. No one could stand up to him, especially a cop or plainclothes agent. From the moment he was released he was tailed by a regular detachment of plainclothes agents. This was a mistake. Frasyniuk simply disappeared. He "submerged," or went underground for a few days, and met with Zbigniew Bujak. On July 29, 1984, they issued a joint statement about the necessity to continue the struggle for the restoration of Solidarity. No one had thumbed his nose at General Kiszczak like this for a while. From then on the release of well-known political prisoners was handled according to a special procedure. I was not aware of this.

On August 6, 1984, that is, two weeks after the declaration of the amnesty, I was told to pack up. I packed my personal belongings, books, and above all the manuscript of my book *Chłopi w Polsce piastowskiej* into a duffel bag. I went through all the required procedures, and I was ready to leave. To my surprise, the ward supervisor ordered the corridor warden to carry my luggage. Never had I ever met with such treatment in prison, yet I meekly followed the warden and the trustee prisoner who had the bag with my manuscript. At the inner yard next to the entrance to the ward was a white fiat 125 with Wrocław plates. A plainclothes man got out of the car, immediately opened the trunk, and placed my priceless luggage inside. Another plainclothes man invited me to take the backseat. A third man was the driver.

They took me to Sobótka and dropped me at the entrance to my building, but they did not return to Wrocław, even if they were from the Wrocław SB. They stayed there and never left my side. They changed shifts every eight or twelve hours. When I went to Wrocław on the bus, one or two of them would board the bus while the others followed in a car. They also did this in Wrocław, as well as back to Sobótka. Once, the bus was so crowded they did not manage to squeeze in. They tailgated the bus and blazed their headlights onto its back window until the bus driver got mad. He stopped at a phone booth and called the militia complaining that some hoodlums were creating a danger on the road by blinding him in his rearview mirror. The militia arrived, but with visible regret they refrained from punishing the reckless driver and reluctantly helped one of the plainclothes agents board the bus. A similar escort, or rather convoy, was assigned to Frasyniuk when he returned from his underground escapade, as well as to Józef Pinior. Both were released from prison by the same amnesty. What was worse, the officers from my convoy had a nasty habit of checking IDs and recording people who greeted me on the street. Probably the plainclothes agents accompanying Władysław, Józef, and other “top shelf” activists released from prison did the same thing. This was a kind of mobile *cordon sanitaire*. Finally, after two months, when my wife and I were returning home on a local train from Wrocław to Świdnica, my escorts stood in a row on the platform. They all politely bowed, and their commander explained, “We won’t be going to Sobótka with you tonight. Good night.”

THE STALEMATE

It was impossible to know the number of supporters of underground Solidarity in Sobótka at that time. Certainly nothing was left of the Union factory commissions that had existed before December 1981 in the local candy factory, brewery, and quarry. On the other hand, there was a group of several dozen people who were in open opposition to the regime. They unfurled a banner with the Solidarity logo after a mass held on top of Mount Ślęża in August 1985. I knew them personally, especially their informal leader, Bogusław Majdziński. He was brave and radical in his anticommunism, but other than that he had no distinct political identity. Neither he nor the people gathered around him were Union members at that time, but they could not express their enmity toward communism in any other way except by reaching for Solidarity symbols. The young, local parish priest, Father Piotr Śliwka, provided them with institutional support. He was a very talented preacher with a great booming voice, handsome and charismatic. He surely was attractive to young women, which for a Catholic priest was a troubling quality. He also fashioned himself after Father Popiełuszko and his sermons.[2] Encouraged by Father Śliwka, I went with his parishioners (which in this case meant most of the declared opponents of the regime in Sobótka) on a workers' pilgrimage to Częstochowa on September 21, 1986. We took a rented bus. On the way the participants sang many songs, not all of them religious. One song, despite its poetic naïveté, struck me as an expression of these people's state of mind: "No more welders [this was the nickname for General Jaruzelski because of his dark glasses] no more, no more / They won't turn me into a scoundrel, they won't take my world away / I am a Pole, and I want to be free, forever free!" They also sang an Oasis song with the text modified for me: "Did you know we are a family / did you know we are a community . . . /did you know Karol is with us, / Karol in whom the Holy Spirit dwells."[3] I was embarrassed, but ever since it has been rather difficult for me to have my head turned—because I know that the Holy Spirit is with everybody, even though not every layperson and priest treats It with the proper hospitality.

On that day at Jasna Góra I met many Union activists—friends or just acquaintances. I talked with Wałęsa for the first time since December 1981, and I met Bogdan Borusewicz, who had just been released from

Rakowiecka. People whom I had not seen since the Congress in Olivia in Gdańsk patted me on the back, and some of them even asked me for my autograph. But it did not feel like the old times. I felt as if this was a commemoration of the first Solidarity rather than a gathering of a living Union.

Slowly and with much reluctance, I realized that the underground was in very poor shape. It still operated under the name Solidarity (as giving up that name would be indeed suicidal), and its Wrocław leadership still called itself the Regional Striking Committee, although in fact it was no longer a union movement and had no ability to initiate strikes. There were still clandestine factory commissions, but even where they existed and tried to collect dues and distribute bulletins, they did not govern the minds of the workers. At the beginning of May 1988, when real strikes erupted in several industrial centers (with rehiring the laid-off Solidarity activists in Nowa Huta and Stalowa Wola as one of the demands), Józef Pinior tried to incite the Dolmel factory to strike. He got in touch with the clandestine Factory Commission and managed to be smuggled into the factory. He was a living legend, and when he suddenly appeared in the factory, quite a few people gathered around him. But the intervention of the so-called workers' guard, that is, the factory-hired militia reservists, was enough to prevent the strike. They led Pinior out past the factory gate and delivered him into the hands of the militia. The strikes in May and August 1988 were led by a new generation of workers who were affiliated neither with the first Solidarity nor with the underground. The underground Solidarity no longer had the power to create facts on the ground because the anchor chain that linked it with the workers' base was broken in the first months after the December defeat.

Solidarity's strength in the mid-1980s was neither in factory structures nor in factory workers' support. After martial law its strength was in the empathy and collaboration of a large number of communism's opponents coming from many different social circles. Due to this empathy and readiness to cooperate, the underground Solidarity had a widespread network of distributors and printers, as well as material resources. For instance, owners of apartments were ready to house activists in hiding, despite the risk involved. Independent educational activities existed in the gray zone between the underground and official institutions; these groups often met in churches. There also existed such initiatives as the Civic Committee for Science (SKN) that enabled people removed from the universities and PAN institutes for political reasons to continue their research.[4] Until I was rehired by PAN (that is, until the end of 1987) I received from this committee a monthly stipend equal to the salary of an adjunct professor. This enabled me to prepare and publish works on medieval history that had nothing to do with current politics. There were institutions of independent culture like the "Home Theater" that performed in private apartments, or performances and art exhibits held in churches. There were movies produced and distributed on VHS cassettes. This was all similar to the 1970s opposition but on a much larger scale.

Some factory workers participated in these activities, but the intelligentsia predominated. They read, printed, and distributed the works of leading liberal thinkers. Friedrich Hayek and Karl Popper led their Polish readers on the path of free thinking but not revolution. This is to say, the underground sometimes reached for radical forms of struggle, mainly street demonstrations and clashes with the militia, but in this area it also was weakening and losing its ability to mobilize. On December 16, 1984, Józef Pinior and I went to the ceremony to lay wreaths at the monument of the fallen shipyard workers in Gdańsk. It was known in advance that there would be a demonstration and that the ZOMO would attack us, which would lead to a riot. However, the event was not about demands but a commemoration of the December 1970 and 1981 events. The crowd—no more than 1,500 people including a number of visitors from outside Gdańsk—started at St. Brygida's church and managed to move no more than five hundred meters when the ZOMO charged. To me this was new, and I placed myself on the edge of the column to see better, but Czesław Stawicki of the Wrocław public transport authority pulled me by my jacket and ordered me firmly, "Go into the crowd, otherwise they will catch you." Together with the crowd we retreated to the fenced backyard of the church. From there I could see a large ZOMO trooper who jumped at the fence and furiously started striking it with his baton. This looked grotesque and I had the irresistible impression that I was participating in some pretending game or in a theater of conventional gestures and symbols with no practical outcome. Even the fact that we did not reach the monument and left the wreath in the church had no practical significance.

Large gatherings and demonstrations of many thousands of people sometimes occurred. Such events strengthened the will to resist and had an impact on the balance of power, but they were rare. The 1983 and 1987 pilgrimages of John Paul II to Poland were among such events. The crowds carried many Solidarity signs and slogans, and the pope’s homilies seemed to resurrect the spirit from a few years earlier. Another exception was a very large demonstration of Solidarity supporters who came to Warsaw from all around the country to the funeral of Father Jerzy Popiełuszko on November 3, 1984. The symbol of the delegalized Union still united large masses of opponents of the dictatorship, but this source of resistance lacked the power to strike, therefore it was politically ineffective. The opposition under the sign of Solidarity and masses of its supporters were aware of their ability to survive, but at the same time they had a nagging sense of being unable to change the unacceptable “postwar” situation.

After the July 1984 amnesty, the underground leadership’s lack of effectiveness prompted some of the original Solidarity leaders to create facts on the ground by establishing bodies that would openly act above ground. I was against this because there were no signs that General Jaruzelski’s authorities were inclined to tacitly accept the delegalized Solidarity as an entity that was de jure prohibited yet de facto tolerated. Besides, in my opinion the emergence of a parallel above-ground leadership alongside the clandestine TKK carried with it the danger of undermining and further weakening the underground. The TKK had reached an impasse, but we had—so I thought—no alternative. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. The first step toward creating above-ground structures was met by a police and court counterattack. After the inaugural meeting in Gdańsk on February 3, 1985, three leaders were arrested and sentenced in a disgraceful trial: Bogdan Lis for two and a half years, Adam Michnik for two years, and Władysław Frasyniuk for three and a half years.[5] The impasse was on both sides of the barricade.

Martial law prevented the collapse of the system for some time but did not fix it. The military dictatorship ruled from behind the façade of a single-party system. This dictatorship was neither able to consolidate the social mechanisms of authority nor to pull the economy out of crisis. A dictatorship can for a time impose obedience through repression and fear. It does not need legitimacy based in democratic processes, but in the long run it cannot function without the consent of society. Communist Poland under Gomułka and Gierek did not offer its citizens political freedom, but by and large they passively complied as the needs of large segments of the population were met. Communist Poland under Jaruzelski no longer had this advantage. The new authorities began by brutally suppressing by martial law the citizens' aspirations for freedom, and then they continued to be perceived as an illegitimate power. They had nothing to offer to a large part of the society, who in turn had not forgotten and was unwilling to forgive the violence inflicted on it. There was no chance for "goulash socialism." The impasse assumed the form of a vicious circle. The lack of social approval did not allow the authorities to withdraw from governing through the extraordinary measures that subjected civilian life to strict oversight by the political police and the military. The "post-martial-law" state was in fact a kind of continuation of martial law.

In terms of improving Poland's economy, the results were limited to that which could be accomplished through military discipline. The authorities could more or less secure the supplies to cover the reduced coupon rations. These products were sold at substantially higher prices, which were increased under the conditions of martial law. The authorities also restored the economic administration's compliance with political directives. These measures were important but completely insufficient to overhaul or even halt the deepening crisis. The Polish economy was strangled by the noose of international debt. There was barely enough (or not enough) hard currency acquired mainly by exporting coal to service this debt. Polish factories had to limit production that involved so-called hard currency input, that is, foreign components. What was even worse, there was no hard currency to purchase parts to maintain the equipment. The result was the inevitable decapitalization of the Polish production potential. The generals could keep deceiving themselves that they had saved the economy from a free fall, but they knew that they were not able to stop it sliding into the abyss. There was no rescue in sight. The Polish military dictatorship had a poor reputation in the West; in any case, it was bad enough that there was no possibility for a restructuration of the debt or any tangible help without political liberalization and some gestures toward the opposition. However, under Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko, such gestures would be met by Moscow's hostile reaction, whereas Poland depended on Soviet oil, gas, and cotton at special low rates for Comecon friends.[6]

WINDS OF FREEDOM BLOWING FROM THE EAST

The Soviet system was a personal autocracy in which a great many things depended on the Party general secretary. No other individual counted. But despite the mechanism of choosing cadres through negative selection and the system's devastating inertia, a nonconformist still could find his way to power—someone who thought slightly differently. If people like Dubček, Smrkovský, or Kriegel could rise in the ranks of the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia under Novotný, why could not something similar happen in the USSR?[7] Soviet intervention swept away the Czech and Slovak reformers with their "socialism with a human face." But who could intervene in the USSR? Bulat Okudzhava told me in 1989 that Mikhail Gorbachev approached him at some celebration at the Soviet writers' union in which the top Party and state officials were participating.[8] He shook Okudzhava's hand and confessed, "Dear Bulat Shavlovich, I am so happy to meet you in person!" Okudzhava told me this with a shade of irony, but I felt that his pen, guitar, and voice indeed contributed to the development of the spiritual makeup of the Soviet leader. I was a fan of the same poet as the general secretary—not a small thing.

However, even if an unorthodox person was flexible enough and had enough skill to climb to the nexus of the Soviet pyramid of power, to initiate significant changes he also would need special historical circumstances. In 1990 the war in the Persian Gulf was a TV show for us. With keen interest we watched the newest Soviet-made tanks appearing in the electronic visors of the American pilots whose rockets accurately located these heavy machines and turned them into sad piles of steel rubble. It looked like a computer game—except it was a cat-and-mouse game. The Russians likely were not amused. Under their very eyes

American technology was turning the Soviet military's top engineering feats into junk piles. What an average Soviet viewer could see on television in 1990 had been well known to the Soviet marshals and Kremlin leaders for a long time. Since the time when success in the economy had become dependent on the quality of microprocessors—and therefore success on the battlefield too—the Soviet Union was turning into a secondary superpower. Something had to be done.

Gorbachev and his collaborators represented a new generation in the Soviet ruling elite. They were inclined to consider seriously what the most prominent scientists, people such as Andrei Sakharov, claimed about the causes of the scientific and technological backwardness of the USSR. These scientists maintained that science does not tolerate the inhibition of the free exchange of ideas and that the free circulation of ideas could not be limited just to laboratories. Free exchange was essential in university instruction as well as in education, in general circulation publications, and in social life in general. The Chernobyl nuclear plant disaster, especially the tragic outcome of the ban on information about the explosion and the resulting dangers, initiated a discussion about the need for openness (*glasnost'*) in public life.[9] The new group at the Kremlin was nearing the belief that it was essential to modernize the USSR to keep pace with the West, and that this could not succeed without controlled democratization. Sakharov had been exiled to the town of Gorky since 1980 because of statements critical of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and his notorious dissident activities. On December 16, 1986, Gorbachev himself called Sakharov on the phone and asked him to return to Moscow and resume his scholarly and public activities. This was an unheard-of gesture, but very telling and widely publicized. It made a great impression on Soviet society. Sakharov returned to Moscow and took an active part in the process of democratization, the so-called *perestroika* (rebuilding). In the 1989 parliamentary election that was held in a climate of substantial political relaxation, he was elected as deputy to the Supreme Council. Censorship was curtailed, and press publications gained a far-reaching independence. Independent political movements emerged and established themselves in several Soviet republics. Compared to the "post-martial-law" Poland, the Soviet Union of 1986 to 1988 almost seemed to be a free country.

A popular notion among political scientists says that the most dangerous moment for a bad system is when it attempts to correct itself. It is hard to see this as a “historical law” (if such laws exist at all), but there is something in it. In the case of the Soviet empire this notion worked. I must admit with some embarrassment that unlike Adam Michnik, I initially did not appreciate the importance of *perestroika*. Ever since I reached adulthood I was afraid to go to the Soviet Union. I was not scared that I would be locked up, but I was afraid they would consider me their own subject who had illegally left the Soviet homeland and that they would not let me return to Poland. I only dared to go there in 1989. Professor Juliusz Bardach talked me into participating in a symposium on the Middle Ages organized in Kiev by the Soviet Academy of Sciences. I then was a member of the Polish Senate, and with my diplomatic passport I thought I would not be in danger. From the first day of the proceedings in Kiev I was struck by the fact that the Ukrainian participants talked among themselves in Russian, although they all delivered their papers in Ukrainian. This annoyed the Russians who had come from Moscow and Leningrad and who did not understand the native language of their colleagues from Kiev. They justly regarded this behavior as a demonstration of separatism. On the third day of the meeting, the Polish participants (some dozen of us) went on a field trip to archeological sites in Chernikhov. From the driver’s characteristic accent I recognized he was a Ukrainian, even if he spoke in Russian. He came from a peasant family. At the very beginning of our trip he told us that at the age of four he had been sent by his parents to relatives far away, and because of that he had survived the great famine.[10] He was not able to return home because the area where he was from was sealed off by a tight cordon. The inhabitants of his native village, including his parents and siblings, had died of hunger. Our driver told this to us with no qualms, despite the fact we were strangers. Then we drove into the woods. The driver changed the subject: “Do you see this ‘Memorial’ marker?[11] I will tell you something. Five years ago my firm sent me to bring here a group of workers with shovels. When we arrived I was told to take a walk. This made me curious, so I circled back and returned to the same spot. The workers were digging in the ground and uncovering human skeletons, layer upon layer. I was scared and went away, and in the forest I met an old woman picking mushrooms. It was clear she was local, so I asked her, ‘Babushka, what happened here?’

“‘*Vidish*, *synok* [You see, my son], during the great repressions in 1937 and 1938 they brought people here on flatbeds pulled by tractors. The tractors did not even turn off their engines, and then they returned empty.’”

Our driver continued, “Shortly afterward I read in the newspapers that a site of mass murder perpetrated by the Nazi invaders had been discovered. How could they lie to the people in such a way! What Nazis? These were our people. *Our people*!”

Later I realized that we had been taken to Bykovnia.[12] A few years earlier the Polish newspapers had written about it as well because there were Polish remains there too—uniform buttons with eagles. One can read the commonality of the Polish and Soviet lot in the cemeteries of the Great Terror: Katyń, Bykovnia in Ukraine, Butovo near Moscow, Mednoe, likely also Kuropaty in Belarus, and other similar execution sites.[13] The Russian corpses were the lower layers because they were executed first, and the Polish officers and policemen from the so-called Katyń list were on top because they had been shot at the end, in the spring of 1940. However, in 1989 the most striking thing for me in the Ukrainian driver’s story was that he was telling us about the macabre discovery and the regime’s shameful lies without a trace of fear. Fear was dead! It was as if the eternal tsar had died, the almighty ruler of the empire. Fear had been the most important glue, the mortar that bound the walls of the fortress of the Soviet Union. Just like in the anthem, “Soyuz nerushymyi respublik svobodnykh splotila na veki Velikaia Rus’. Da zdravstvuet sozdannyi volei narodov edinyi, moguchy Sovetsky Soyuz.”[14] Without fear the Soviet Union was no longer unified or unbreakable; it was fragile and divisible. For the first time I realized that that state had no future.

After the symposium was over I went to Moscow. My friend Bernard Guetta was the *Le Monde* correspondent there; he had the same role in Warsaw from 1980 to 1981. I told him I was in Moscow for four days, and I would like to learn whatever I could during that very short time. Bernard was brutally direct: “Don’t go to the dissidents. They will tell you the same moral truths that you already know all too well. It would be a waste of time. Go see the intellectuals who work for Gorbachev." He gave me several contacts, or rather phone numbers. Among these people was the editor of the monthly *Communist* (that is, the theoretical mouthpiece of the CPSU Central Committee), Otto Latsis.[15] I went to meet him feeling as if I were entering the inner sanctum of ideological nomenklatura. Latsis turned out to be very straightforward. He shook my hand, said, "Good morning," and with no further ado declared, "*Eto razval Imperii* (this is the fall of the Empire). Now the only important thing is to preserve something akin to a commonwealth (*nechto v rode komonwelsa*)." This was two years before the formal dissolution of the Soviet Union and the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States. I was surprised not so much by the content of his statement (after what I saw in Kiev, I doubted the permanency of the Soviet Union myself) as the language used by the *Communist* editor-in-chief. Latsis spoke like a Western political scientist. There was no trace of ideological newspeak.

It seems unlikely that Gorbachev himself spoke and thought with such cold clarity. Undoubtedly his objective was not the empire's obliteration but its modernization. I think up until the end he had counted on preserving the Soviet Union as an entity, perhaps at the price of Germany's unification and the relaxation of control over the satellite Eastern European states, as well as substantial concessions to the West, especially in armaments. The continuation of the arms race had become a burden beyond Moscow's capabilities. The Cold War had to be ended in reality, not just verbally. Gorbachev realized this and wanted to adapt to it—not in order to destroy the Soviet Union but to save it. He turned out to be a sorcerer's apprentice, not the first and not the last.

THE MYTH RESURRECTS

On February 1, 1988, the government announced large new price increases. The OPZZ, that is, the regime-affiliated but already not always compliant trade union federation, started bargaining about compensation to offset the increases. Steeper price increases had been introduced during martial law after the government broke the resistance and was no longer afraid of the workers' reaction. But nearly seven years had passed, and a new generation of workers *came to* factories. These were people who in

December 1981 were still in school, and they remembered martial law more as an adventure and spectacle rather than as a disaster. Besides, this was the time of *perestroika*.

On April 24, 1988, Bydgoszcz public transportation went on strike. The reason was high prices—the strikers were demanding a salary increase, and Solidarity had nothing to do with the strike. The strike was legal, at least it was endorsed by a trade union that belonged to the OPZZ. This event, even if it was local and seemingly not dangerous, triggered a chain of consequences that resulted in serious political change. On April 26, the Huta Lenina in Nowa Huta near Kraków went on strike. This was a giant factory which then employed some thirty thousand people. Neither the official trade union was involved in the protest nor the Solidarity underground or above-ground structures. The strike was led by Andrzej Szewczuwianiec, a born rebel with a colorful biography who had never belonged to Solidarity.[16] When the prosecutor arrived at the factory to warn the organizers that they were violating the law on collective bargaining, they responded that this law did not apply to them because they did not belong to any union. However, alongside the pay increases, the workers demanded that the two workers fired for Solidarity activities be returned to work. At Huta Stalowa Wola the workers also held a two-day strike on April 29–30. They demanded pay increases and the reinstatement of the fired members of a founding committee who had tried to register a factory trade union using the name Solidarity.

Ten days later on May 5, the Nowa Huta strike was pacified in the same manner as during martial law. The ZOMO detachments entered the iron plant, and the workers were beaten and forcibly removed. From the authorities' perspective this was an equally risky step as would be further tolerating the strike. If seven years after the introduction of martial law they had to resort to the same methods, the political effectiveness of the "crow's" great victory was in question. The Church protested because the ZOMO was beating the workers when a group of mediators sent by the Conference of Bishops (with the authorities' knowledge) was in the factory. Moreover, this pacification did not work. The workers continued their strike in an absentee form and eventually won reinstatement for all who had been fired for striking. From May 2 to 10 there was a strike in the

Gdańsk Shipyard. It was initiated by the people from Solidarity including Wałęsa who felt compelled to support the Nowa Huta steelworkers, even if he thought their action was premature. This time the demands included, alongside pay increases, the restoration of Solidarity. In response to a plea by Tadeusz Mazowiecki and Archbishop Gocłowski, this strike ended with no agreement.[17]

The 1988 spring strikes had a limited scope. The authorities seemingly had no reason to be afraid, with the exception of Nowa Huta, where the number of strikers and their stubborn determination likely scared those in power. This was a signal that the earth was shaking. The next wave of strikes that rolled over Poland between August 15 and September 3, 1988, looked much more dangerous both because of the size of the protests and the nature of the demands. The strikes started in the Manifest Lipcowy coal mine. The strikers demanded cost-of-living salary adjustments, and they put forward some issues specific to coal mining. However, the demand "to restore the right for trade union pluralism including the right for 'Solidarity' to act legally" was at the top of their list. This demand was endorsed by the other mines that joined the strike. At the top of their lists of demands was the reinstatement of Solidarity, as well as demands regarding salary and work conditions for the entire industry or for individual mines. On August 18 the Inter-Factory Striking Committee was established; at the height of the strike it represented ten mines.

At that time the underground Solidarity leadership was no more. On November 25, 1987, the Countrywide Executive Commission (KKW) of Solidarity, with Wałęsa as its head, was established at a joint session of the TKK and the Solidarity Provisional Council (TR "S") that was created after the 1986 amnesty. The KKW became the sole leadership body of Solidarity, and it existed above ground. Upon the news of the strike, its representative, Bogdan Lis, went to Jastrzębie, but he was not the one who started or directed the protest. Also, upon learning of the strike, Tadeusz Jedynak, formerly the head of the underground in the Silesian region, flew back to Poland from the United States and showed up at the Manifest Lipcowy mine. Obviously he could not have initiated the events either. Jan Lityński rushed to help the miners and played an important role as advisor to the MKS, but undoubtedly he was just reacting to the events that had already started. These events were not initiated by Alojzy Pietrzyk either, even if he soon assumed a leadership role in Manifest Lipcowy. Pietrzyk was a participant in the August 1980 strike, and he was active in the first Solidarity, and was interned during martial law. He was popular and regarded by the miners as one of their own, but he was neither in the underground nor in the new above-ground Union leadership. He showed up at the striking mine on his own initiative shortly after the strike started. Therefore it appears that the most serious battleground of 1988, the one in which the demand to reinstate Solidarity was put forward by the Manifest Lipcowy strikers and echoed by all the striking mines, emerged outside of the Solidarity structures. Neither the underground nor the KKW had organized these strikes. So who did?

It is hard to tell if the secret police had the answer to this very important question. But it seems to me that the people responsible for combating strikes in Upper Silesia understood the mechanism of the events. The military draft board proved to be most effective deterrent against the striking miners. Many strikers were young men of draft age who were substituting compulsory service by working in the mines. Sending individual warnings en masse declaring that participation in a strike would result in losing one’s deferment and being drafted into the army for two years proved quite effective. The strike was melting down. Its driving forces were the people who knew the first Solidarity and martial law from stories told by their parents, older siblings, or older colleagues. They had not personally experienced the fear at seeing a tank breaking through the factory gate or machine guns aiming at the strikers. They had not experienced the demoralizing humiliation of a surrender in the face of violence or bending the knee because of fear for their families. The ten-million-strong Solidarity and martial law were not their formative experiences. They did not participate in the underground. All of this was legend for them.

I think it was similar for the young workers in Huta Stalowa Wola, where a strike broke out on August 22 with a call to reinstate Solidarity. Likely the same factors were at play in the Wrocław Railroad Fleet Repair Shops, the Ponar factory in Ostrzeszów, and the port and public transportation depots in Szczecin. The relatively important role played by the historical Solidarity leaders in starting the August 1988 strikes in Tricity was more of an exception than a rule.[18]

The 1988 strikes were much weaker than the ones eight years earlier. They did not deliver the knockout blow that could send the generals to their knees. But they rang an alarm bell that Jaruzelski’s team could not disregard in the changed international situation. The destruction of the first Solidarity and crushing the underground were their success and claim to fame in their own camp. Now it turned out that this success could be undermined by a specter resurrected from the grave. The young organizers of the strikes in “Manifest Lipcowy” and other mines might not have experienced the original Solidarity firsthand, but they understood that the best guarantee of their safety and success was to have the broadest possible support from workers from other factories. To receive such support, it was not enough to demand economic benefits for themselves, or even for all coal miners. They needed a slogan uniting everybody, something clear to all and that would resound throughout the country. The call to reinstate Solidarity fulfilled this role in August 1988. The underground Solidarity was no more, and the KKW and its regional equivalents had no organizational structure capable of organizing. Solidarity was just a myth, and this myth proved to be the power with which the generals had to reckon.

For the vast majority of Poles the first Solidarity was the only experience of freedom in their lives. Moreover this was freedom actively practiced within a large community and with a sense of brotherhood. This is something one never forgets. It is something about which you tell your children. The myth fed on this memory.

A myth is a nonmaterial being. It cannot be crushed by tanks, executed by firing squads, or locked up in prison. None of these can hurt a myth. To the contrary, they strengthen it. The only thing that can destroy a myth is the deep disappointment of its believers when they feel have been deceived.

The SB had sufficient knowledge to know and inform its supervisors that Solidarity as an organized mass movement had been destroyed. The organizers of the May and August 1988 strikes were not Wałęsa’s charges. On August 31, 1988, General Czesław Kiszczak and Wałęsa met. They talked about the preparations for the Round Table. Kiszczak put up a condition—Wałęsa was to call to end the strikes. It is possible that this was a kind of test, perhaps even tainted with a shade of derision: “Mr. Wałęsa, if you are that strong, tell these people to stop striking.” Of course Kiszczak knew these were not Wałęsa’s people. But Wałęsa agreed and issued a call to end the strikes. After this appeal the strikes ceased. The generals realized that Wałęsa and Solidarity’s historical leaders and advisors were regarded as legitimate trustees of the myth. They carried a magic wand that was able to keep peace within the country, therefore they were the people with whom to talk during the time of social storms and upheavals. Moscow was no longer keen to send its troops to save the satellites and no longer prohibited Polish generals from making deals with the hydra of counter-revolution that so recently seemed to be destroyed. At the turn of August and September 1988, prominent CPSU officials declared before Western journalists that they saw nothing terrible in the potential return of Solidarity to the political stage. With the lack of opposition from Moscow, it seemed that the way to the Round Table was open. But such negotiations had to be authorized by the Party Central Committee (KC) as required by the procedures of a communist state.

The solution came during the second part of the KC Tenth Plenary Meeting on January 16–18, 1989. The draft of the resolution gave the permission to start the Round Table negotiations and restore trade union pluralism, which meant reinstating Solidarity. During the discussion a large majority of the KC members were vehemently opposed. This was no longer the “concrete” of 1981, that is, a faction of Kania and Jaruzelski’s opponents backed by Brezhnev. This was a new “concrete” that identified with martial law and considered the destruction of Solidarity its claim to fame and political raison d’être. They regarded the idea of talks with the defeated hydra and its restoration to full rights as plain treason. Everything indicated that the KC would reject the proposed resolution.

The generals decided to go for broke. Jaruzelski, Kiszczak, Siwicki (the Minister of Defense), and Rakowski (the prime minister) all submitted their resignations, along with the entire Politburo. But their resignations were rejected—nobody voted in favor, and only four KC members abstained. At that point the large majority voted for the resolution against which they so vehemently had protested during the discussion. The same people who regarded Jaruzelski a traitor were scared that he would leave.

The “concrete” was infuriated but did not lack a sense of reality. These people knew that Jaruzelski had Gorbachev’s support and Moscow’s permission to make deals with the opposition. Besides, the rejection of the already announced dialogue would inevitably inflame the already dangerous social tensions. The new Party leadership and government would have to cope with protests through confrontation relying on the military and police, just like seven years earlier, whereas the Polish Army officers’ core stood firmly behind Jaruzelski. The Party, marginalized during martial law, was now more a dummy than a real “leadership force.” It was not able to defend itself, so it voted as instructed. On February 6, 1989, the Round Table negotiations started.

NOTES

1. Trans. FLV.
2. For Reverend Jerzy Popiełuszko, see chapter 1, note 18.
3. The Oasis Movement (Polish: Ruch Oazowy) is a popular name for the Light-Life Movement, one of the revival movements in the Catholic Church. It brings together both clergy and laypeople of different ages for religious as well as community activities. The movement originated in Poland in the 1950s.
4. The Civic Committee for Science (Polish: Społeczny Komitet Nauki, SKN) was an independent countrywide structure active between 1983 and 1989; among its objectives were to represent the views of the opposition-minded scholarly community, aid the repressed scholars and students, and evaluate the state of scholarship.
5. They were arrested on February 13, 1985, during a meeting with Wałęsa and other above-ground Solidarity activists, and they were accused of participating in a meeting of an illegal organization (that is, the TKK). Their show trial started on May 23, and they were sentenced on June 14.
6. Comecon, or the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, existed from 1949 to 1991 under the leadership of the Soviet Union. It comprised the countries of the Eastern Bloc, along with a number of communist states elsewhere in the world (Cuba, Vietnam, etc.). Trade between the Comecon

countries was conducted in so-called transfer rubles, a virtual currency that had a fixed value in the domestic currencies of these countries.

7. Alexander Dubček (1921–1992), Josef Smrkovský (1911–1974), and František Kriegel (1908–1979) were the leaders of the Czechoslovak Communist Party during the 1968 Prague Spring. Antonín Novotný (1904–1975) was a conservative general secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party between 1953 and 1968 and the president of the state from 1957 to 1968.

8. For Bulat Okudzhava, see author's note, note 1.

9. The reactor explosion at the Chernobyl power plant in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic from April 25 to 26, 1986, is considered one of the worst nuclear disasters in history. The first laconic public announcement about the explosion was released by the Soviet media on the evening of April 28.

10. The Holodomor (Ukrainian: Голодомор, which means "murder by hunger") was a man-made famine in the Soviet Ukraine in 1932 and 1933 in which nearly seven million people starved to death.

11. "Memorial" (Russian: Мемориáл) is a Russian organization that records and publicizes the USSR's totalitarian past and monitors human rights. It operates in a number of post-Soviet states.

12. For Bykovnia, see chapter 1, note 4.

13. For Katyń, Mednoe, see chapter 1, note 4. Butovo Firing Range, south of Moscow, was an NKVD restricted area used as an agricultural farm, shooting range, and place of execution; at the height of the Stalinist terror in 1937 and 1938, more than 20,000 people were executed there, including more than 1,000 Poles. Kuropaty is a wooded area on the outskirts of Minsk, Belarus, a mass execution site between 1937 and 1941; the exact number of victims is unknown but estimations range between 7,000 and 250,000 or more.

14. "An unbreakable union of free-born republics / Great Russia has welded forever to stand / Created in struggle by the will of the people / United and mighty, our Soviet land!" (Wikipedia: *State Anthem of the Soviet Union*, https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_Anthem_of_the_Soviet_Union#English_lyrics).

15. Otto Latsis (1934–2005) was a Soviet and Russian journalist of Latvian descent. Between 1987 and 1991 he edited *Communist*, a journal intended to propagate communism but in fact advocating *perestroika*.
16. Andrzej Szewczuwianiec (b. 1950) was arrested in 1975 for attempting to blow up Lenin's monument in Nowa Huta, but eventually he was sentenced to six years in prison for stealing a typewriter; in 1981 he participated in a prisoners' riot in the Potulice prison; in 1988 he initiated a strike in the Lenin steelworks in Nowa Huta; after 1989 he moved to Szczecin, where he was arrested for a break-in; during a furlough from prison, he escaped to the West; and as of 2015 there was still an outstanding warrant out for him.
17. Tadeusz Gocłowski (1931–2016) was the bishop and then archbishop of Gdańsk between 1984 and 2008.
18. For Tricity, see chapter 5, note 3.

Chapter 9

Liberty without Brotherhood

They marched shouting, “Poland, Poland,”
While marching they forgot her name,
But being sure God knew
They went on shouting, “Lord, our fatherland!”
From behind Moses’ bush
God appeared and asked, “Which?”
—Juliusz Słowacki[1]

NEGOTIATING AFTER HARDSHIP

I did not participate in the Round Table negotiations. Not that I had anything against them. To the contrary, when to my surprise the authors of martial law decided to seek a consensus and reinstate Solidarity, I voiced my unambiguous support for the negotiations in the underground press over the objections of our radicals. Previously I had opposed the creation of the TR “S” because I thought it would marginalize the underground, and therefore I was not included in the group that now was entering into dialogue. Besides, even though I had done my bit at the beginning of the 1980s, gentle persuasion with the authorities was not my strong point. I preferred the Middle Ages. Neither was I one of the founders of the Solidarity Citizens’ Committee (KO “S”).[2] Yet when asked, I promptly went to a meeting in Warsaw. When I arrived there its secretary, Henryk Wujec, presented me with the sign-in sheet. I remarked that I had not yet joined the KO “S.” He raised his eyebrows and said, “Here you do not join but are appointed.” In fact, at the beginning of the “war at the top,” Wałesa decided to dismiss Wujec as secretary. Henryk said that he could only be dismissed by those who had elected him, to which the chairman responded curtly, “Wujec, consider yourself dismissed.” As for me, I accepted my summons without objection, and when the agreement was reached at the Round Table, without protest I agreed to represent the “‘Solidarity’-opposition side” for the group that was writing the preamble to the final document.

Even if I did not participate in the negotiations themselves, I was thoroughly informed about their progress. Władysław Frasyniuk told me all the details of what was happening in the Council of Ministers' Palace and in the notorious Magdalenka.[3] The black legend about the elites at the Round Table concocting a plot on the backs of the people seems rather comical to me. Of course, both sides were scheming—but one against the other. Neither the intentions nor the outcomes of these schemes remained secret—it is known how both sides operated, and above all, it is known what came out (or rather what did not come out) of it.

According to Frasyniuk's reliable account (as well as others'), "our side" was above all afraid of participating in the "negotiated" elections for the Sejm and then assuming "coresponsibility for the state" by joining the government. The "other side" strongly pressed for both. The main goal of "our side" was the relegalization of Solidarity. To achieve this, we were ready to agree to be elected to the Sejm, and if needs must, even reluctantly join the government. Never mind that there was complete symmetry of fears and hopes. The authorities were scared of making Solidarity legal again. On the other hand they hoped that the introduction of the top post-Solidarity people into key state institutions would allow the authorities to avoid dangerous social conflict and enable them to modernize the economy with the acquiescence of the society. The communists would continue to keep the most important instruments of power.

As everyone knows, the elections resulted in a crushing political defeat of the government. As a result, the Party was abandoned by its then allies, and even by some of their own parliamentarians. The government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki assumed power, and within a few months the last remaining communist ministers (the Ministers of the Interior and Defense) were removed. Soon after, Jaruzelski resigned as president, and as a result of a general election, Wałęsa took office. The communist formation (this may not be the most precise term, but I cannot find better) lost power, and the system that had been introduced after World War II ultimately fell. Solidarity was legalized, but it turned out it was five times weaker numerically than in 1981, and it lacked the main source of strength, that is, the dynamic activism of the crowds. In the completely free Sejm elections in 1991, Solidarity managed to introduce around two dozen representatives who initiated a no-confidence vote and served as a tipping point to removing the government. This was the post-Solidarity liberal-conservative government of Hanna Suchocka. After its downfall and the dissolution of the Sejm by President Wałęsa, a postcommunist party SLD won the new elections and created a government. But the previous system was not restored.

During the Round Table negotiations, the Solidarity side strongly resisted the idea to create the office of president that was pushed for by the "government-coalition" side. The president was to be elected by the National Assembly (that is, jointly by the Sejm and the Senate) and granted very broad powers, especially over the army, police, and foreign policy. It seemed obvious that the PZPR, ZSL, and SD coalition, to which the "negotiated" elections had guaranteed 65 percent of the seats in the Sejm, would elect Jaruzelski without any problem. In fact, this was to be the security given to the USSR because the president had a constitutional duty to monitor Poland in fulfilling its "obligations toward the allies" within the Warsaw Pact. Wałęsa proved to be an effective negotiator at the Round Table, and he managed to limit the dictatorial prerogatives that the "government-coalition" side wanted to grant to the president. However, since the fall of 1990 when he himself became president, Wałęsa complained about the undue limitations on the rights of the head of state. He tried to broaden them—by creating facts on the ground, among other things. He was particularly interested in the so-called presidential departments—Defense, Interior, and Foreign Affairs.

When in the Palace of the Council of State the sides quibbled about the presidency, Aleksander Kwaśniewski suggested an attractive reward in return for "our" consent—the creation of a Senate that, unlike the "negotiated" Sejm, would be elected with entirely free elections. And this was the final deal. But the "government-coalition" side wanted to protect itself from a complete defeat in the Senate elections, which would be very harmful for its image. The electoral rules were conceived so that the elections were free but unequal—two senators for each voivodship regardless of the number of inhabitants. Only the city of Warsaw and the Katowice voivodship would have three senators each. Treating Wrocław equally to Suwałki, or Łódź to Skierniewice, was supposed to give an advantage to the candidates of the government camp. They assumed that there would be some Solidarity structures capable of running an electoral campaign in Wrocław and Łódź, but not necessarily in Suwałki. On the other hand, there were Party Voivodship Committees in Suwałki, Biała Podlaska, and Skierniewice, and they should have been able to cope with the poorly organized enemy. It was a clever idea, but it did not work. There might not have been Solidarity structures in Skierniewice, but there certainly were parishes. The defeat of the ruling party in the Senate elections was as complete as it was humiliating. However, as a result of the ruling side's "clever" idea, we ended up with an upper chamber with a definite overrepresentation from backward parochial Poland. This was not what the designers of the electoral rules had intended.

Yet the biggest disappointment for the "government-coalition" side designers was the notorious "negotiated" elections to the Sejm. These elections were intended to secure the Party and its traditional satellites (ZSL, SD, PAX, ChSS, and PZKS) a safe majority of 65 percent of the seats in the Sejm.[4] Theoretically such a majority would secure the election of "their" president by the National Assembly, even if the opposition had won all one hundred seats in the Senate. This was the theory, but it turned out not to be enough in practice. The weak point of the deal was the fact that the seats set aside for the Party and its allies were to be filled through elections and not by nomination. The Party voivodship conferences designated official candidates for each seat. However, other Party members could seek election to the same seat providing that they had collected three thousand supporting signatures. In a number of cases these other Party candidates were supported by the local Solidarity. The same rule applied to the seats that were often referred to, inaccurately, as assigned to the opposition. They were assigned to nonpartisan candidates. Anyone running for such a seat could not be a member of any party and had to collect three thousand signatures. Solidarity did this for their candidates, but nothing prevented the Party from putting forward its supporters, and they did this many times. Yet not one of these counter-candidates who were tacitly supported by the Party won a seat because they were not standing next to Wałęsa in their campaign posters.

Of course the “government-coalition” side could not deny voting citizens the right to choose between candidates for the seats assigned to the Party and its allies. But in this way even these seats were infested with the deadly bacillus of democracy. The representatives who took these seats did not feel much like Party nominees. They may have felt more loyal to their electorate than to the KC, and even more so if they won their seats because of support from the Citizens’ Committee.

In July 1989, as the National Assembly (that is, the Sejm and Senate together) was to vote for Jaruzelski’s candidacy for president, it turned out that the Party was not completely in charge even of its own parliamentary caucus, not to mention the ZSL, SD, and PZKS. Preliminary estimates indicated that Jaruzelski might lose. This would have indeed been the case, if not for some discreet help from the OKP.[5] Our strength was in the ballots, but they were just pieces of paper. Jaruzelski’s group had in their hands the army, the secret police, the militia, and the administration of the state. The general’s defeat could also cause shock waves in Moscow despite *perestroika*. Caution suggested that it would be safer to let Jaruzelski win. The bishops agreed. So two of our parliamentarians who had connections with the episcopate, Andrzej Wielowieyski and Andrzej Stelmachowski, deliberately cast invalid votes. Representative Marek Jurek and Senator Zdzisław Nowicki of Olsztyn left the room right before the vote under the pretense that the choice was a mockery because there was only one candidate. One of our senators—who later became known for his right-wing views—went even further. He voted for the general. Eventually Jaruzelski won by just two votes. But the fact that he became president because of this assistance prevented him and his allies from dictating political solutions.

Then there was the so-called countrywide list. This was perhaps the most painful shot in the foot for the initiators of the “negotiated” elections. They insisted that the top leaders of the governing coalition (and preferably the opposition leaders as well) be on the ballot for the Sejm according to a rule that had been in place in the pre-1956 People’s Poland—one candidate for one seat, with no opponents. These candidates were to be elected not locally but by the entire country—thus the “countrywide list.” To be elected, a candidate had to receive 50 percent plus one votes from all eligible voters. “Our side” opposed this but eventually simply refused to participate in this bizarre arrangement. During the electoral campaign I stated publicly that the “countrywide list” was suicidal. This did not require much insight, and even today I do not comprehend how seasoned politicians from the governing camp could have missed it. Only two candidates from the “countrywide list,” Mikołaj Kozakiewicz and Adam Zieliński, passed the threshold of 50 percent of votes and won their seats. Everyone else, including General Kiszczak and Prime Minister Rakowski, simply did not make it. Rakowski got around 45 percent of the vote, a truly remarkable result, but not enough. The “countrywide list” seats that were not filled derailed the distribution that had been agreed upon during the negotiations, according to which the Party and its allies had to have 65 percent of the seats in the Sejm. There was a fear that this would nullify the entire Round Table agreement and the elections. Just in case, the “‘Solidarity’-opposition” side decided to throw the other side a lifesaver. They agreed to change the electoral rules. Two candidates who met the Party criteria were to run in the supplementary election. One of the two had to win, therefore preserving the negotiated distribution of seats. The opposition pulled the government out of the deep water, but at the same time it placed it in a position of humiliation and weakness.

I think I can sum up the stories of conspiracy at the Round Table—everybody there was conspiring like crazy, but the anemic effectiveness of these schemes confirms the accuracy of the old adage, “He who digs a pit for others falls in himself.”

I received my Solidarity summons at a most inconvenient moment. After a twenty-five-year ban from teaching, I was able to take the position as docent at Wrocław University. I also received a very prestigious visiting professorship at the Collège de France and the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris. However, in the meantime, the Round Table agreement had been reached. It stipulated that the parliamentary elections were to be held on June 4, 1989. Władysław Frasyniuk and Barbara Labuda came to talk this over with me.

“Karol, you know perfectly well that the Sejm and the Senate are of secondary importance,” they declared. “All that really matters is the Union.”

I certainly understood. I was as wrong as they were, and I assured them I agreed.

"So you have to admit that Frasyniuk should not run in the elections. He needs to be in the Union."

I nodded.

"But we need to win these elections. And we desperately need to win the Senate, because this election is free. We have to have someone to front the campaign—someone who is known and remembered from 1980 and 1981 in our region. If Frasyniuk can't do it, then it has to be you."

I said I understood, but I could not do it. I did not want to give up lecturing at the Collège de France or the École des Hautes Études, and I was supposed to be there for three months between April and June. What kind of candidate is absent during his campaign because he is off in Paris?

Barbara's face fell. She had spent a few years on a scholarship in Paris in the 1960s and knew all about the Collège de France and the École des Hautes Études. She understood what was at stake. She did not even try to argue. After this conversation I returned home with some slight pangs of conscience but with a magnificent sense of freedom. The homeland was almost free, so let it cope by itself. I could do what I pleased. But once again, my old foe the secret service got in my way.

I had been employed at the Institute of History PAN since December 1987. To go abroad for scholarly purposes I had to have a passport for institutional travel, which I was denied. In April 1989 this was simply outlandish. My friend Stanisław Trawkowski, then a deputy director of the Institute of History, was so surprised that he called some colonel at the MSW Passport Bureau and demanded an explanation. In response he heard, "Professor, we cannot let him go abroad because the penal proceedings in which he was accused of attempting to overthrow the system have not been closed. The case was suspended, but only conditionally. If he goes to Paris, he may talk to the press, and we would have to lock him up. But how could we do that in Paris?"

This was like a lame joke, but it spread like wildfire. Frasyniuk and Labuda were ecstatic.

"See, they won't issue you a passport. Now you have to become a senator."

So I became one. I campaigned and went to rallies like the old times. I spoke at the Sobótka stadium, in a large hall in Wołów (but outside of the prison), and from the altar in a few Wrocław churches. My current wife, a radio journalist who had been interned and fired from her job during martial law, interviewed me on the air. I received 75 percent of the vote. This was a decent result, although I am not sure if it significantly strengthened Solidarity in Wrocław or the OKP caucus. One thing is for sure—I soon earned the badge of constant complainer in the OKP caucus, the Senate, and the media. From my professional standpoint, these two and a half years (a shortened parliamentary term) were lost. I add this time to my prison years (perhaps leaving out my last stint in Mokotów when I completed my manuscript of the book on peasants). But something lost, something gained—in the Senate of 1989–1991 I found a good vantage point, and some experiences worth mentioning.

THE SHOCK

On August 1, 1989, Mieczysław F. Rakowski's government abolished food coupons and ceased regulating food prices. These prices—with the exception of bread and low-fat milk—were to be based exclusively on supply and demand and not depend on governmental subsidies or administrative decisions. Jeffrey Sachs was not even planning on going to Poland yet when the last Party-appointed government chose to take the plunge into the free market—even if it was limited only to the food sector of the economy.[6] In the People's Poland this was particularly sensitive, both socially and politically. Food expenses were the biggest part of household budgets for the majority of less well-off Poles. The workers' rebellions that shook the communist dictatorship and eventually contributed to its downfall erupted because of the rise in food prices. Rakowski and his collaborators were exposed to the kind of economic liberalism that predominated in the West, but they acted out of sheer necessity and found courage only because they were convinced that they would find understanding among the participants of the Round Table. In these historical circumstances the government's idea to "free" the prices for food indeed found sympathetic interest among some members of the "'Solidarity'-opposition" side. I also think that the persisting problems with market supply were an important reason for Rakowski’s decision. Instead of lowering the coupon rations and once again raising the official prices, the government decided to leap into the free market for food. This was the last leap for this government and this Party.

Agricultural production in the People’s Poland was for the most part handled by individual farmers, and its structure was compatible with the free market. The infrastructure for wholesale purchasing and retail trade was different. These were monopolies, and their demonopolization could not occur overnight, unlike the decision about deregulating prices. Because of the monopoly of the middlemen who operated between the agricultural producers and the market, there was no mechanism to stop rising prices. They flew sky high. On July 31, 1989, that is, a payday, one 250-gram stick of butter was 17.50 zlotys; at the end of August the price reached 70 zlotys. Heads of households went berserk—there was no way they could feed their families with these galloping prices. The capping mechanism for salaries through the so-called *popiwek* was not in place yet.[7] However, even if you got a pay increase—which was usually insufficient anyway—you had to wait until the next payday. And people needed to eat every day.

Clearly all of this had an impact on the mood in society and on the political situation. The prestige and political standing of the governing group were shaky from the start because of the dramatic circumstances of Jaruzelski’s election as president—he had been elected with the discreet help of several opposition parliamentarians. Moreover, it became clear that the parliamentary majority that the Round Table agreement was supposed to secure for the PZPR-ZSL-SD coalition was practically dead.

On July 3, 1989, two weeks prior to Jaruzelski’s election by the National Assembly, Adam Michnik published an editorial in his *Gazeta Wyborcza* titled “Your President—Our Prime Minister.”[8] The idea that a coalition government would be headed by a post-Solidarity politician initially was met with reservations on both sides of the new political stage. I was against the idea as well and presented my arguments in a polemic also published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* (“Let’s Not Create the Government, But Let’s Not Step Aside Either”).[9] I thought that we would have to give the Party the Ministries of Defense, Interior, and Foreign Affairs in “our” government because of geopolitical reasons. Because Jaruzelski’s group already had the army, the police, and the bureaucratic apparatus effectively in their hands, under the pretense of "our government" it would preserve the control over the most important levers of power. All that would be left for us was to administer the economic debacle, that is, responsibility for the drastic decisions that would quickly wear out the tremendous social support we enjoyed at that moment. At the same time, by assuming a governing role, we would deprive Poland of a credible opposition. Indeed, General Florian Siwicki remained the Minister of Defense in the government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki, and General Czesław Kiszczak remained the Minister of the Interior. Only the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was given to a non-Party minister, Professor Krzysztof Skubiszewski, who was respected by "us" and tolerated by "them."[10] It seemed that my question "Who is really in power?" was relevant. But my reasoning, even if rational, was erroneous. It took into consideration neither the psychological burnout in the group that had been in power nor—and perhaps more importantly—Moscow's tacit acceptance of the Party giving up its power.

I was not the only one who opposed the idea of "our prime minister." Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the editor-in-chief of the newly restored *Tygodnik Solidarność*, published a long critique of Michnik's idea.[11] Shortly afterward, Mazowiecki became the new prime minister. This is ironic, but we still should carefully assess his arguments. Mazowiecki pointed out that in the face of the dramatic crisis of the Polish economy, a party that would assume governance should have a serious economic program. We did not have such a program because we had formed as opposition to a dictatorship and never saw ourselves governing. In this situation it would be irresponsible to blindly accept the power and then try to devise some ad hoc programmatic improvisation.

I have to admit that Mazowiecki's objections were much better justified than mine. His arguments sound convincing even today. Soon after the formation of his government, I met him in the lobby of the Sejm, and I asked him what made him change his mind. He replied that the decisive factor was the change in the situation after Rakowski's government deregulated food prices. The prices for basic articles shot up, and anxiety in society grew rapidly. Solidarity enjoyed great social trust and was able to calm the waters and save free Poland from a dangerous upheaval. Three years ago Adam Michnik poked fun at my naïveté in his panegyric/critical essay about me.[12] But I was just repeating what Mazowiecki told me. I did not look into his soul and speculate whether he was personally tempted by the extremely difficult role of prime minister. Besides, Mazowiecki’s argument that only a Solidarity government could placate the anger of society played a very important role in the considerations and negotiations of politicians on both sides, including the discussions conducted by Adam (such as those with Janusz Reykowski and Aleksander Kwaśniewski). These backroom talks were not economic seminars. Wałęsa played a key role even if he was not an economist; formally he was just a trade union leader and had no right to nominate a candidate for the post of prime minister. Still, he played his role very effectively. He sent his closest collaborator—at that time Jarosław Kaczyński—to confidential negotiations with the leaders of the two parties that the PZPR had been long treating as vassal allies, that is, the United People’s Party (ZSL) and the Alliance of Democrats (SD). When Prime Minister–designate General Czesław Kiszczak was not able to form a coalition, Wałęsa met with the ZSL and SD chairmen. He stood for a symbolic picture with them in front of television cameras, and then he recommended to Jaruzelski the candidacy of Mazowiecki for prime minister. Jaruzelski agreed, and “our government” was soon assembled. It won a vote of confidence in the Sejm and only then started to work on the economic program.

I was bound by the OKP caucus discipline, but I decided to keep my distance and freedom to criticize. When the government was formed, I went on vacation and did not give out my address (in those distant times there were no cell phones). But my public statement in *Gazeta Wyborcza* against forming a government under our aegis would have protected me from being asked to join it anyway. This does not mean I intended to keep my political friends from accepting responsibilities in the government. I just maintained my distance, something that soon allowed me to publicly criticize the economic policy adopted by the new government. I first did this at an OKP meeting on the Balcerowicz Plan, and then on December 29, 1989, in the Senate during the vote on a package of legislation that enacted the Balcerowicz Plan.

The Balcerowicz Plan was an extremely radical option. When society protested, the plan's advocates claimed that "there was no other way." Such ridiculous propaganda is handy in political campaigns but unacceptable in serious and responsible scholarly analyses, as well as in honest discussions by experts. If journalists use the phrase such as "the only way," we shrug because such phrases are daily bread in that trade. However, if economists use it, they are changing their spots—moving from the role of scholar or responsible advisor to the role of propagandist. Still, it is important to consider the true meaning of "the only way," as well as to consider if there were any other ways, and if so, what they were.

According to what Mazowiecki wrote shortly before becoming prime minister, he had no idea what to do with the Polish economy as the communist dictatorship was collapsing. Like most Polish intellectuals with a humanistic background, he knew nothing about economics. His ideological standpoint could be characterized by a term that today is fading into disuse—"Christian socialist." He was a Christian socialist in the best meanings of both these words. The social result of the Balcerowicz Plan must have really pained him.

Mazowiecki's strategic choice largely turned out to be a result of his personal choice. He needed to fill the post of the deputy prime minister who would coordinate the stabilization of the economy and its systemic transition. It is well known that "our" prime minister assembled his government from his address book. His first choice was Professor Witold Trzeciakowski, who was a very prominent economist.[13] In addition to deep theoretical knowledge, Trzeciakowski had practical experience; he was also ideologically close to the prime minister. But Trzeciakowski turned down the offer. He saw too many uncertain factors in this entirely new situation, and he had too many fears and concerns. Some Polish economists who had been in the West for many years suggested Leszek Balcerowicz. I think Waldemar Kuczyński's voice was the most significant; he had been Mazowiecki's deputy editor-in-chief at *Tygodnik Solidarność* before he left Poland during martial law. Unlike Trzeciakowski, Balcerowicz had no qualms. For some time he had been a devout believer in Milton Friedman's economic doctrine that then reigned not only in Chicago but also at the International Monetary Fund and at the top European universities. Balcerowicz accepted Mazowiecki's offer and took the post of the deputy prime minister and Minister of Finance. He kept these posts all throughout the governments of Mazowiecki, Jan Krzysztof Bielecki, and Jerzy Buzek.[14] Both the notorious stabilization plan and the systemic transition of the Polish economy are associated with his name. Trzeciakowski was among the fiercest critics of Balcerowicz's policy. His public criticism was very restrained, but I remember something he told me privately during a break in the Senate proceedings: "We're jumping head-first into a swimming pool without looking to see if it has any water." This suggests that in Balcerowicz's place Trzeciakowski would have acted differently—in any case, more cautiously. So from a factual perspective, the claim that there was "no other way" seems inaccurate. There was—if Trzeciakowski had accepted the offer, things would have gone differently. This is of course a simplification. Trzeciakowski was motivated by different values and worked from different theoretical premises. He surely would have leaned toward different solutions even if exposed to the same pressure from the IMF and subjected to the same economic circumstances.

There is a widespread, if largely exaggerated, opinion that the International Monetary Fund imposed the Balcerowicz Plan on Poland. Poland was indeed in a debt trap and desperately needed an agreement with its foreign creditors. The deal with the IMF was a precondition for such an agreement. The spirit of Milton Friedman's school ruled absolute at the IMF. The IMF prescribed, or sometimes imposed, the same brutal therapy on Latin American countries strangled by hyperinflation. The stabilization of their currencies and the balancing of their budgets were to be achieved in exchange for accepting recession and a lowered standard of living. The IMF negotiators proposed a very similar recipe for Poland and other countries in which communism had collapsed. However, in Latin America, despite state indebtedness and inflation there was a well-established market economy. On the other hand, the systemic circumstances in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, post-Soviet Russia, and Ukraine were completely different than, say, Chile. The basic mechanism of a market economy did not exist and could not materialize overnight. Applying more or less the same prescription regardless of the fundamental systemic differences and very different social, historical, and cultural ramifications speaks poorly about the authors of this therapy and the theory on which it was based. Reality did not matter for them—doctrine did. They were convinced that they had found something that Stanisław Lem called “the general theory of everything” in his satirical science fiction.

Even if the IMF experts were economic doctrinaires, they could be pragmatic in negotiation. They not only made demands but also bargained. If the other side resisted, they were able to give in and seek a compromise. But Balcerowicz’s group did not resist. They volunteered the most radical version of a stabilization policy from among the IMF proposals, one that the IMF representatives themselves considered an entree to bargaining. Michael Bruno, then the head of the IMF team of experts, wrote in his book *Stabilization and Reform in Eastern Europe* that the position of the Polish government’s representatives was a pleasant surprise.[15] Balcerowicz and his collaborators were fully convinced by the radical arguments of their American counterparts. This was not so much about political pressure as it was about doctrinal unanimity. On the Polish side of the negotiating table sat devout believers in the same theory that determined the top IMF experts’ understanding of the global economy. This was rather characteristic of the state of mind of the Polish intellectual elites and their attitudes toward the neoconservative and neoliberal thought that dominated in the United States and England from the beginning of the 1980s. States of mind, or even intellectual fashions, should not be disregarded as factors in choosing this or that governmental strategy.

The creators of the Balcerowicz Plan compared its stabilization elements to using a powerful explosion to put out a fire in an oil field. The decisions that resulted in drastically increased prices were treated like an explosion producing a shock wave to break the vicious circle and suppress inflation. Of course this was a metaphor for a procedure designed—as it had to be—to siphon money from people and enterprises, as well as to reduce state budgetary expenses. This “fire-quenching explosion” was triggered in several ways. First, by a centrally ordered price increase for raw materials for energy production and electricity. These prices rose by 400 percent; this created a very strong impulse to increase production costs and market prices. Second, the state practically gave up any intervention in the prices of goods and services (with very few exceptions). Thus the same policy that Rakowski's government applied to the agricultural and food sector was extended to the entire economy. Producers and traders were free to raise prices at will. The socialist economy had been built following a plan and not according to the market. The principal rule was simplicity of administration, and the administrators preferred not to have too many factories producing the same goods. This was an extremely monopolistic economy not just in terms of ownership but also technology. When enterprises got a free hand to set prices, these prices were set by producers-monopolists. In the Polish economy, the internal competition mechanism that could slow down raising prices did not work. Prices flew sky high until the drop in sales and demand started to generate losses greater than margins of profit.

The freeing of prices and the triggering of their increases by greater production costs went hand in hand with administrative salary caps. The punitive tax on above-standard salary increases introduced within the framework of the Balcerowicz Plan played a key role. This tax was good-humoredly nicknamed *popiwek*.[16] The state-owned enterprise could compensate at the most one-fifth of the increase of cost of living without financial penalty. For every zloty of the "above-standard" salary paid to the employee, the enterprise had to pay the treasury 5 zlotys *popiwek*. Thus the plan's premise was the decrease of real wages in the state-owned industries—the greater the inflation, the greater the decrease in wages. The principles of free market applied to prices but not salaries—at least not in the state-owned factories. Private firms could pay whatever they wanted, as the *popiwek* did not apply to them.

In the name of fighting inflation, the authors of the stabilization plan also drastically raised credit interest rates. This happened overnight—effective January 1, 1990. Those who earlier had taken out a loan fell into a debt trap leading straight to bankruptcy if they did not pay the loan back in full within a month. This was even worse if they had invested the money. Many firms were vulnerable. State-owned enterprises frequently fell into this trap, despite the fact that they mostly did not invest during this extremely difficult times. The blackest scenario most likely affected the farmers who had ventured into specialized farming. There were not many such farmers in Poland, but they were the hope for progress in the Polish countryside. Unlike traditional farmers whose farms were largely focused on self-sufficiency, they would take out a loan, for instance to build a large pigpen, buy a herd of sows, and start commercial husbandry. But the production cycle in farming and husbandry depends on the laws of biology and not economic theories and banking regulations. As a rule, it takes longer than thirty days. Whoever built a pigpen, bought a herd of sows, and inseminated them had no possibility (or for that matter even the right) to sell them within the thirty days that the Ministry of Finance required to repay the loan. The farmer would be finished. These farmers called New Year's Eve 1989 "the night of long knives."

My current wife was then a journalist restored to her job in the agricultural section of the Wrocław division of the Polish Radio. Every week she would go to gather materials in the villages of the Jelenia Góra voivodship. During one of these trips, she recorded a long conversation with a sheep farmer who had taken out a loan to buy fodder and to inseminate his flock and then had fallen into the debt trap. He could not even afford to pay to slaughter his herd. "I had to liquidate them myself," he confessed bitterly. Journalists can be cruel—this is almost a prerequisite of their trade. My wife asked him what "liquidate" meant—and this middle-aged and tough man suddenly started to cry like a baby. "I had three hundred feeding ewes, and I had nothing to feed them with. I took a knife, and cut their throats, one after another. The blood, you had to see it, so much blood, so much blood!" It was hard to tell if he was more shaken by the slaughter itself (that normally he would not have done himself because usually farmers hire specialists) or the tragedy that this unlucky entrepreneur had to destroy his life's work with his own hands. The tears of a sheep farmer are not an economic category. But the despair and anger of these people are political categories. These emotions became a breeding ground for the political phenomenon of Andrzej Lepper, the populism of the Self-Defense party, and the popularity of the slogan "Balcerowicz must go!"[17]

As a part of the Balcerowicz Plan, an administrative act increased the book value of fixed assets in state-owned enterprises by 200 percent. On face value this was just an accounting move; however, it increased the depreciation charges, and as a result also the costs of production and prices. Above all, the new value of fixed assets, three times greater than before, was the basis for a new and particularly harmful tax imposed only on state-owned enterprises. For an unknown reason this tax was called the "dividend." State-owned producers (as well as private enterprises) paid a tax on their profits (akin to today's CIT) and—unlike private firms—they also paid a tax on the above-standard wages.[18] If they kept pay increases within the centrally assigned framework, that is, at a level five times below inflation, then they did not pay the *popiwek*. If they did not generate profits or record losses (which during the transition years happened more and more frequently), they did not pay the profit tax. But nonetheless they had to pay the "dividend," even if they were financially in the red. This was a tax intended to kill off poorly performing state-owned enterprises. I believe this was the objective of the authors of the Polish transition. On the surface they talked about encouraging the enterprises to get rid of their superfluous fixed assets. But they did not conceal that they also wanted something more than just to stabilize the currency and budget—above all they wanted to rapidly change the structure of ownership and the economic system inherited from communism. Giant state-owned factories had to go into private hands as fast as possible or go bankrupt. "The society will not forgive us if in a year we are living in the same economic system," declared Stefan Kawalec, Balcerowicz's deputy in the Ministry of Finance. I have to admit that the 1990s' post-Solidarity intelligentsia learned from us—the activists of the first Solidarity—the ugly habit of presenting their deep personal convictions as the views of "all society."

Many years later Tadeusz Mazowiecki in conversation with Teresa Torańska admitted, "The idea that the largest factories would start collapsing was very hard on me. . . . After we adopted the laws that introduced the market economy, my friend Waldemar Kuczyński said to me, 'What's going on, they already should be collapsing, and they aren't?' This was the economist's calculation that an insolvent business had to collapse. I got goosebumps. . . . Our regained independence was due to the strikes in the largest factories in 1980. It was they who had won 'Solidarity.' I had hoped our social policy would offset the start of the free market economy.” Unlike the prime minister, his deputy Balcerowicz did not hope for this—to the contrary, he balanced the budget. He conceded only as much as Jacek Kuroń, Minister of Labor and Social Policy, managed to wrangle from him. This slightly alleviated the tragedy but was not enough to prevent the wholesale ruin of the large industrial enterprises.

The stabilization plan was developed in a friendly collaboration with the International Monetary Fund. It predicted that in 1990 the industrial production in Poland would drop by 5 percent and real wages would drop by 8 percent. There were talks about temporary unemployment at the level of about 400,000 people. At the same time prices were supposed to rise by 45 percent. Reality immediately surpassed these estimates. Prices grew twice as much as predicted (by 80 percent in 1990). At the beginning of 1990 industrial production had already fallen not just by 5 percent but by 30 percent. Real wages also fell by nearly 30 percent and not just by 8 percent as predicted. After two years, real wages were lower by more than one-third than in 1989. During 1990 the recorded unemployment jumped from zero to 1,000,000 people. In 1991 it went up to over 2,000,000, and in 1992 it approached 3,000,000. The dramatic drop in the number of people employed in the national economy (including both recorded and hidden unemployment, as well as a large number of people doing temporary work or who were paid “under the table”) turned out to be the longest-lasting result of the Polish transition. The gross national income (more or less the same as what we now call the GNP, but differently computed) fell by 11 percent in 1991; over the two years from 1991 to 1992 it fell by 18 percent. This was the deepest recession since the Great Crisis of 1929–1933. The fact that the outcomes of the Stabilization Plan diverged so quickly from the predictions does not disqualify its authors as professionals, but it should tone down their hubris and their self-assurance as economists who tend to treat their shaky predictions as the results of hard science. Balcerowicz and his people ventured into an unknown territory, or rather they led Poland into the unknown. It was impossible to predict the results. The Russian, Czech, and Hungarian followers of our reformers also bruised themselves and their societies, sometimes even more painfully.

It is by no means unusual that Balcerowicz’s team miscalculated their prognoses. What is remarkable is the fact that the yawning gap between the predicted indicators and the actual results did not prompt them to soften their policy. Quite the opposite—when it turned out that the monopolized economy inherited from socialism had “leaped into the market” and the self-regulatory competition mechanisms did not materialize overnight, the helmsmen of the Polish economy failed to realize that a longer transition and appropriate state policy may be needed. They continued to take the shortest way to the intended goal. They simply increased the pressure to speedily privatize state-owned enterprises (by bankruptcy or by decree). In my opinion this indicates that the motive of social engineering dominated in their intentions and thinking over practical tasks to rein in inflation, salvage the currency, and balance the budget. They wanted to “build capitalism” as fast as possible. This slogan was repeated not to amuse listeners but in dead seriousness. Even Jacek Kuroń repeated it, and nobody—perhaps save Jacek Bocheński—noticed the ridiculousness of this formula that (unconsciously?) recalled the slogan of the past about building socialism.[19] But their words indeed reflected their conviction. The zeal with which the leaders of the Polish transition headed toward “building capitalism” had all the characteristics of ideological motivation.

At the beginning of the 1980s the term “capitalism” still evoked bad associations. The advocates of liberal reforms preferred to talk about “the market economy,” while the most aggressive opponents of Solidarity accused the Union of wanting to restore capitalism. We regarded these accusations as base slander. Ten or twelve years later the economists from “our” government, echoed by the post-Solidarity writers and journalists, worked hard to make everybody associate the word “capitalism” with a bright future.

This led to many paradoxical situations. A few years ago I participated in a panel discussion organized by *Tygodnik Powszechny* in the Gdańsk Shipyard BHP Hall. I arrived through Gate Number 2 and looked at the abandoned production halls with their smashed-in windows. Apparently ships still were being built somewhere there, and almost two thousand people were still employed out of the once twelve-thousand-strong workforce. But the shipyard looked like a dying giant. On the other hand, the BHP hall looked like an elegant memorial site. We sat behind a table facing the audience: Lech Wałęsa, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, myself, and Solidarity historian Jan Skórzyński, who was the moderator. Wałęsa, as always attuned to fashionable language, mentioned something about our struggle for capitalism, but decency prompted him to add that we had not been talking like this at that time because the people would not have understood. Someone in the room reminded me that I had paid for this struggle with lots of jail time. Skórzyński let me respond. Without thinking I retorted, "Apparently Wałęsa knew something that I didn't. I was not struggling for capitalism. I served eight and a half years, but I wouldn't have been there for a day for capitalism." Was I just being immune to fashionable words? I always had known that after the fall of communism some form of capitalism inevitably awaited us. But did it need to be the form that we have now?

The reformers who governed us in those years are often blamed for the great material losses in the production assets of Polish industry inflicted by their reforms that were implemented at a revolutionary pace and manner. Aleksander Małachowski wrote about this as "reform through ruin."[20] This was a very strong phrase, but it was justified. The rushed privatization, especially in combination with inadequate private capital, resulted in selling out state-owned enterprises (including many of the best ones) at drastically reduced prices, as well as giving away shares for a symbolic fee within the framework of the so-called National Investment Funds. The fact that the purchasers were acquiring significant production assets at extremely low prices was not conducive to the responsible administration of these assets. The foreign "investor" (in this case this word sounds like a travesty) who bought the Bistona textile factory in Łódź dirt cheap did not maintain the production at all. He quickly sold the machines and equipment, profiting greatly, and departed with his money. The same thing happened to the Porcelana china factory in Wałbrzych, which was purchased by a domestic businessman. The Bistona workers protested, and the Porcelana workers tried to defend their workplace with a strike, but they lost to the Great Change.

There are many such examples. But these drastic instances do not seem to be the most important aspect but rather a more general phenomenon, that is, a direct and devastating encounter with the competition that large socialist enterprises faced after the collapse of the dictatorship. In the 1960s when the Soviet Union was at the peak of its power, some economists and economic historians were inclined to treat communism as an effective way of implementing industrial revolution in backward countries who had no chance to catch up with their competitors from the leading economic powers. This was a very simplistic view; nonetheless it helped in understanding the important determinants of the historical situation. This applied not only to third world countries, such as China or Vietnam, or deeply backward Russia. Interwar Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, and Hungary as well were also included in the sphere of European underdevelopment. In all these countries industrialization, then equated with modernization, was done under the communist dictatorship. It was separated from the world competition by its suspended market mechanisms and by the economy that was rigorously subjected to the constraints of central planning and administrative directives. In the times when economic and military power was not determined by fancy technologies but by the tonnage of cast steel and mined coal, as well as by the numbers of heavy machinery, tanks, and weaponry, “real socialism” could stand up to the challenge. That system produced large quantities but of inferior quality. Protected by the walls with which it separated itself from the rest of the world, the system managed to develop elements of a great industry that was sizable but poor in quality, technologically backward and ineffective, and therefore unable to compete. Upon the “leap into the market” and the removal of the protective barriers by the state monopoly on international trade, that potential was exposed to a devastating blow from the competition.

A deep social shake-up accompanied the economic shake-up. The “socialist industrialization” had brought social advancement to millions of people. The economic resources that had been built were not competitive in the global market, but they provided the grounds for everyday sustenance and social status to a great numbers of workers, technicians, engineers, and also indirectly school teachers and academics. The destruction of these resources, today largely irreversible, brought with it the destabilization and social degradation of these people. The psychological, cultural, and political consequences of that trauma affected our everyday life and still threaten our regained freedom. I know the slogan, “There is no progress without sacrifice,” but I see no progress here. Besides, I do not know what this worn-out word “progress” is supposed to mean.

For me the irreversible downfall of the Polish factories was not an abstraction. I knew these places and these people. I had attended rallies and meetings in the Wrocław factories: PaFaWag, Dolmel, Elwro, Archimedes, Hydral, Predom-Polar, Fadroma, Hutmen, and Ponar. I knew the union activists from Factory Commissions there, and I felt an affinity with them. Nearly all these factories currently are either no longer in existence or barely subsist. Only Dolmel, which was bought out by the ABB Corporation, has survived economically, but of course it has been downsized. The factory closures destroyed the social networks that bound their workers into cohesive collectives. I know Wrocław the best, but other places are similar. The Warsaw FSO car factory and the Gdynia Shipyard are no more. The elimination of the Polish shipyard industry is the result of a decision by clerks from Brussels made in the name of neoliberal dogma. This looks like the last chord in the great process of Poland’s deindustrialization.

Poland is by no means an exception. The end results of “the leap into the market” were similar, if not worse, in other postcommunist countries: Russia, Ukraine, and especially the GDR, even if Balcerowicz’s ideas were not followed everywhere. The eastern states of Germany were simply united with the German Federal Republic. This automatically entailed the unification of currency as well as the immediate removal of all protection of Eastern enterprises from competition by Western companies—including the German ones. Working within the common state, the common market, and within common regulations did the job. Nobody intended to kill socialist enterprises with a “dividend,” or *popiwek*—they collapsed by themselves. The social trauma was ameliorated by generous help from the welfare state and by the possibility of moving west as a simple relocation within Germany and not abroad. In Poland the shock of foreign competition was less severe. On the one hand, the government introduced far-reaching incentives for bringing in foreign capital and for importing goods. At the same time, extremely high foreign currency exchange rates that were designed as an instrument of the governmental program to fight inflation lowered the profit margins for imports and stimulated exports, thus slowing the recession. Economic and social shock appeared in all places where communism fell. It is this background against which we may speculate whether there might have been an alternative to the policy implemented by the Polish government.

This is not about the Balcerowicz Plan as a set of particular instruments and actions. Many things could have be done differently, but discussing these options changes nothing and seems futile. Something else is much more important. Could the production assets of big industry inherited from communism have been preserved from destruction caused by sudden exposure to competition from the world’s most modern and efficient producers? Could it have been possible to choose a strategy of gradual transition under the shield of the state rather than to “leap into the market?” Could it have been possible to preserve and modernize the domestic potential so that over time it would be able to face the challenge of competition?

Such questions have no firm or certain answers. There is a surplus of specialists who consider themselves the owners of truth, so perhaps it should be explained where the uncertainty in interpreting results of research in the humanities and social sciences springs from. Why is it often impossible to resolve fundamental controversies by unambiguously pointing out truth or falsehood?

Every scholar begins with a selection and from the beginning deals with many bits of information that may be true or false—but most are simply irrelevant. A scholar must select the ones that are significant for some particular research and then tie them together in a sensible way. The evaluation that a scholar applies is a value judgment by its very nature. Nothing is relevant per se, but it can be relevant because of research objectives. The hierarchy of these objectives is the hierarchy of values. This principle applies not only to the research of a sociologist, historian, or economist but also to that of a physicist or geologist. However, the difference between the knowledge of society and the knowledge of nature is that physicists do not dispute the values that underlie their laboratory or theoretical work—these are common values and can be taken for granted. It is different with research into society where contradictory values result in different criteria for selecting information and combining it into sensible structures that are called interpretations. These interpretations may clash with each other, and the values are not verifiable information but norms that indicate which objectives we should consider more important than other objectives. A dispute about values is resolved by choice and not by logical or empirical verification. Employing statistical techniques in so-called empirical sociology does not change this fundamental characteristic. A researcher may not possess philosophical self-awareness about the preconditions of the researcher's own thinking inherent in professed values. Or the researcher may deliberately ignore them because they cause discomfort or are obstructing the ability to convince others. However, in scholarship, ignorance is not a virtue, and it fears critique.[21] Tadeusz Mazowiecki is said to have explained that in his economic policies he followed the opinions of economists. But economists' opinions tend to differ from each other, and in this case they were different. Apparently Mazowiecki did not know this. Was it possible that the economists who worked for his government did not wish to weaken the prime minister's determination with the knowledge that some of their colleagues were of a different opinion? In academic debates and in written expert opinions, one cannot omit factors that contradict one's own theories or pass over opponents' opinions in silence, especially if these opponents are prominent scholars. A follower of Milton Friedman cannot pretend that the views of Joseph Stiglitz (Nobel Prize laureate in economics and former World Bank head) that contradict his favorite doctrine do not count. One cannot consider Jeffrey Sachs an authority when he prescribes a leap into the market and disqualify him as a renegade and impostor when he changes his mind and claims that the leap was into a blind alley. And one cannot publicly claim that complex economic issues are as simple and uncontroversial as 2 plus 2, and only a simpleton or ill-willed person would disagree. Unfortunately, all these sins were committed in our transition propaganda.

However, these sins do not determine the answer to our question whether the transition could have been done differently. I feel entitled to ask this because it not only concerns the economy but, more importantly, history, that is, my profession. I reluctantly lean toward the assumption that the "leap into the market" was the unavoidable consequence of a systemic cataclysm, that is, the fall of communism. I am even more convinced that there was no political alternative. Even if from the economic point of view it could have been possible to choose an evolutionary mode of transition after the fall of the dictatorship, there was no auspicious intellectual climate or political and social forces capable of enforcing and implementing such a strategy.

Let’s begin with the parliament. The Senate, of which I was a member, was freely elected. It was dominated by—what should I say?—Solidarity, as we then still thought. Ninety-nine out of the one hundred senators had a picture with Wałęsa and the KO “S” logo written in the Solidarity script on their electoral posters. In fact, many former Union activists sat in this chamber, and it should have been expected that the very drastic antiworker policy that we were expected to vote on expeditiously at the end of December 1989 would be met with serious resistance. During the debate, I strongly criticized the governmental program, and I declared that I would vote against the proposed tax legislation (I was particularly against the *popiwek*, and the “dividend”). No one else took part, and most of my colleagues looked at me as if I were from another planet. My criticism of “our” government caused embarrassment and indignation. Only six senators voted as I did. In the lower chamber there was not even this slight opposition. The PZPR representatives, apparently aware that history had sent them to the dunce’s corner, obediently voted as they were told, as did the ZSL and SD representatives. These parties were in the new coalition and showed their loyalty to the new “leading power.” There was no opposition in this wholly Solidarity-loyal Senate in that parliament, unless one counts my six colleagues and myself.

I cannot even say that the OKP representatives and senators had “severed” themselves from their base since they settled in Wiejska Street in Warsaw. I met this base myself soon enough. A week or two after the Senate deliberations on the new economic order, the Solidarity Factory Commission in the Wrocław Hydral factory invited me to a discussion meeting with the workers. There were at least four hundred people in the room. I had enjoyed popularity and receptiveness here since 1980, and I felt I was among my own people. When I presented my critical evaluation of the Balcerowicz Plan, I was met with silence. I knew how to talk to workers, and I had no doubt that they understood me. But I felt the painful embarrassment of my listeners almost physically. I was one of them, but I was standing up against “our” government. Only one woman, near her fifties and facing a layoff, poured out her complaints that were somehow in tune with my expose: “My husband is dead, I am supporting three young children, this factory has taken my health, and now they are telling me that I must be industrious and find a new place?!” The rest of the people were not in a critical mood. Their attitude toward Mazowiecki’s government was something more than political trust. It can be described rather by a term borrowed from ecclesiastical language—something akin to trusting themselves to “our” government.

The attitude of the masses toward the leaders during the “first” Solidarity was also emotional, but there was no blind trust. Activists at all levels—from factories to the Countrywide Commission—and rank-and-file members wanted self-governance above all. They would entrust themselves to nobody, not even to Wałęsa. In order to effectively manage this movement, it was necessary to constantly talk to crowds who wanted to decide for themselves, the Union, and Poland. In January 1990 at the Hydral meeting hall in Wrocław, I saw with my very eyes that this spirit of self-determination had vanished without a trace. This was a different Solidarity. The problem was not that 80 percent of its former members had not returned when the Union was reactivated. The main thing was that the overwhelming spirit of self-determination had been broken by the armed forces, and it had never returned. The rare phenomenon of the common independent activity of millions of people had been destroyed beyond repair. The myth had survived, and it had revealed itself in the 1988 strikes. When “our” government emerged, “our” prime minister and his people naturally became the legitimate standard-bearers of the myth. But a myth neither expresses the aspirations of the masses for self-determination nor does it possess the instruments or will to control the chosen few. Where a myth reigns, its priests’ hands are not tied. Their decisions are met with no resistance.

During martial law we comforted ourselves with the slogan “‘Solidarity’ is alive!” This gave us the illusion of strength. The first Solidarity fell victim to violence and did not survive. This is the answer to Lionel Espin and Emilio Gabaglio’s question—why did Solidarity agree to the Balcerowicz Plan? Solidarity did not object because it no longer existed. The domestic liberals’ complaints that Jaruzelski did not take the opportunity created by martial law to introduce radical economic reforms to Poland as Pinochet did in Chile somehow misses the point. In fact, he did; Jaruzelski paved the way for Balcerowicz. However, the results of the Polish transition may be evaluated—and of course such evaluations are and will be diverse and change overtime—one thing seems evident. The Balcerowicz Plan could only have been undertaken and implemented because at a decisive stage it did not encounter a strong and organized resistance from society. Indeed, the myth of Solidarity served the conductors of the Polish transition like a shield. When protests erupted, the systemic changes already had passed the critical point. Besides, these protests were scattered. They encompassed separate factories and their workers who found themselves directly threatened. It was by chance that Hydral was one of the first Wrocław factories completely destroyed by the transition. Hydral had employed six thousand workers—highly qualified and with strong organizing skills. They protested, but to no effect. Their isolated protest was bound to lose with the Great Change. A large part of the skilled workforce left to seek jobs in the Czech Republic or elsewhere; others scattered in search of safety wherever they could find it.

The lack of coordinated resistance enabled the Great Change but by itself did not make this change a political necessity. The route the Polish government had chosen was decisively influenced by the current of neoliberal thought and neoconservative politics that predominated in the West at the time of globalization. Shortly afterward authorities in other countries where communism had collapsed took the same path. This ideology completely captured the circles of experts and decision makers in the International Monetary Fund. It shaped the way of thinking and the actions of the US government not just during the Reagan administration but also the Clinton and first Bush administrations. This applies equally to the British governments under Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair. In such an international climate, the French socialists and the German Social-Democrats also felt compelled to close ranks to the right. This current flooded Poland with a mighty force. The Polish intellectual elites, especially the circles of the anticommunist intelligentsia who were prone to regard the West as their Mecca, readily endorsed that neoliberal credo.

This sometimes required a revision of views. Tadeusz Kowalik, one of a few acerbic critics of the Polish transition, recalled Waldemar Kuczyński's words from 1987, “The zeal with which our liberal opposition . . . attacks the ideals of welfare state . . . is surprising. There is no reason why the prospect of a full return to the economic mechanisms typical of the West requires an unequivocal endorsement of Friedman and against Keynes, and for the American model of capitalism against Swedish capitalism.” But before his return to Poland, Kuczyński changed his perspective. He was prompted both by realism (“this was a time of liberals,” he wrote shortly thereafter) and by a genuine change of mind.

The example of Kuczyński is especially telling. He had been closely involved (as well as emotionally tied) with the workers’ revolution of the first Solidarity. In 1989 he convinced Mazowiecki to put Balcerowicz at the helm of economic change, and then, as a trusted advisor to the prime minister, he secured the smooth collaboration between the two. This was a very important and politically crucial role. I have known Kuczyński for a long time. I have the right to call our relations friendly, and I am positive his change of economic views was not opportunistic. I have a high regard for his stubborn struggle in writing in defense of Polish democracy. In his 1989–1993 diary, he wrote my name in the entry for December 7, 1989.[22] He gave no details—neither the reason for our meeting nor the topic of our conversation. But I remember it. Kuczyński attempted to convince me of his (and the government’s) arguments, likely prompted by my critical comments at the OKP meeting on the Balcerowicz Plan. He was so convinced of his logic that he did not see in his words what was turning me off. He was enthusiastically arguing, as if talking to himself, what a great idea the *popiwek* was. According to him, the *popiwek* was a trap to prevent the state-owned enterprises from compensating inflation with pay increases. Should the factory administration give in to the union pressure, then “their workers would bite their own asses.”

I remember this juicy phrase verbatim because it shocked me. Kuczyński always talked with a flair, but in these words I felt a complete reversal of his sympathies. During the great Solidarity, we swore by the workers in large industrial factories. We were linked with them by seemingly unbreakable anchor chains of unconditional loyalty. By the way, in my case these links were much older; the complex history narrated in this book shaped them long before 1980. When Kuczyński became involved in Balcerowicz’s transition, the passive resistance of the workers’ councils, trade unions, and the administrations of large factories became annoying obstacles on the way to the great goal. This logic caused the reformers to perceive factory workers as their opponents, practically as enemies. In government circles, the workers’ councils, trade unions, and factory administrations were called the “Bermuda triangle” because they could run the ship of the great reform aground, or even sink it without a trace. The workers’ councils, a leftover from the 1981 success, worked in the workers’ interests and tried to protect their factories. The reformers’ objectives were exactly the opposite. No wonder that the workers’ self-governance became a target for Balcerowicz and his people. The reform did not call for an active partnership of the factory groups because it was against the basic interests of the workers.

I understood all of this intellectually, but Kuczyński’s enthusiasm only strengthened my objections. I would not even call this a clash of opinions. Actually it was a clash of contradictory values. My opposition toward neoliberal reform was in a sense conservative—I stuck to my traditional hierarchy of values, which until recently had been our shared hierarchy of values. I put loyalty to people from giant state-owned factories whom I did not know personally over loyalty to my colleagues and friends from the democratic opposition. They had now started to govern and regarded these factories and their workers as the wreckage of socialism. Do not lecture me about who was right in this controversy—each side has their own good reasons. But the victory of the people against whom I stood up was predetermined because no alternative political power emerged.

The formation that today is called the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) fashioned itself after the Western Social-Democrats. Just like the Labour Party under Tony Blair, or the SPD under Gerhard Schroeder, the SLD adjusted itself to the liberal mode of thinking. Both Aleksander Kwaśniewski and Leszek Miller expressed their view that nothing better than the free market had ever been invented.[23] Not just the market, but the free market. I do not know if the leaders of the Polish left, while repeating this catchphrase, meant market self-regulation free from any and all state intervention, but it is difficult to understand this term (or merely the catchphrase) differently. At one point Leszek Miller even advocated for a flat tax, as if he wanted to implement the ideal that Balcerowicz had unsuccessfully tried to introduce during the rule of the AWS-UW coalition.[24] This does not mean there were no differences between the SLD and the neoliberals. Kwaśniewski and Miller's formation was always pragmatic and far from doctrinaire. Between 1993 and 1997, when the SLD was in power in a coalition with the ZSL, they managed to correct some of the most extreme measures of their predecessors to the benefit of the country. But this was more of a correction than an alternative.

Before the "war at the top" caused the OKP split, I made an attempt to bring together representatives and senators from the first Solidarity who were critical of our government's neoliberal strategy.[25] I managed (not without some effort) to talk Ryszard Bugaj into spearheading this kernel of a new group. Initially twenty-nine representatives and senators signed the founding declaration. All belonged to the OKP. Twenty-nine parliamentarians was not an inconsiderable number to begin with, and I thought this could be the first small step in creating a new social movement. But the Solidarity KK that at that time held an "umbrella above the difficult reforms" of Mazowiecki's government refused to give us their blessing and permission to use the name Solidarity. They wanted to restrict the name only to the Union. During the "war at the top" most of our signatories drifted away to the UD or the PC.[26] After a short time we registered as an association named Labor Solidarity (SP).[27] We participated in the 1991 elections and won 2 percent of the vote and five seats. But I did not run, neither then nor later, because I had firmly resolved to focus on my university work and not politics. However, I supported the SP that subsequently changed into the Labor Union (UP) through a merger with a group of politicians from the Polish Social-Democratic Union.[28] I even was the UP honorary chairman for some time. In 1995 I ultimately left to join the ranks of the nonaffiliated. I will spare my readers a detailed report on these experiences because they seem of no significance. The UP scored a relative success in the 1993 election, winning almost 7.5 percent votes and forty-one seats. In the new Sejm the UP was the fourth strongest political power. But this was not a strength that was well rooted in society. Weak roots in society at large were and are a common problem in Polish politics. For a party with the ambition to pronounce and implement an alternative strategy, the ability to mobilize activists in society and forge an organic bond with its social base is essential.

This did not work. I had chosen to be an outsider, and it is not appropriate for me to blame the activists. In any case, I think the main reason for the failure was the low level of social activism that persists in Poland since martial law crushed the great Solidarity. In addition, the social circles to whom we wanted to appeal, that is, the workers of large factories, emerged from the transition weakened, scattered, and with a sense of being wronged without a sense of strength. The Labor Union did not share the SLD fascination with liberalism, but it limited itself to presenting objections and calling for corrections within the transition program. It did not attempt to propose an alternative plan. This confined the UP to the routine parliamentary-political game where it remained until the 1997 elections, when it did not cross the electoral threshold and was marginalized. The “great change trauma,” as the eminent Polish sociologist Piotr Sztompka termed the mood of a great many Poles who were hurt by the transition, was not utilized by the left but by the right-wing populists.[29] This is a big difference.

The transition has modernized Poland, but the social price of this modernization has turned out to be extremely high and, even more importantly, long lasting. We are at the very top of Europe in terms of income disparity and social inequality. These phenomena are permanent and are passed from generation to generation. Equal opportunities remain in the realm of dreams. Most of the children and grandchildren of people whom the ship of neoliberal modernization left behind will not be able to climb on deck. This fact influences their perception of free Poland much more than moralizing didactics.

People who do relatively well and can say that the transition has changed their lives for the better are still the majority. The number of those whom modernization left behind is estimated at some 25 to 30 percent of Polish society. There is no more brotherly love between those who can cope and those who are hurting. Most of the intelligentsia found themselves on the sunny side, in the zone of the so-called middle class, but they hear the sounds of anger, bitterness, frustration, and aggression from their hurt compatriots. When popular frustration and aggression surfaced during the 1990 presidential campaign, and then during various social protests, particularly the road blockades organized by supporters of Lepper with the call “Balcerowicz must go,” the public intellectuals sided with Balcerowicz. As in every conflict, this one agitated and polarized the emotions.

THE BILL FOR THE TRANSITION

I dislike the word populism. Its etymological source, that is, the Latin name for the people, *populous*, has a dictionary meaning that is neutral. But nowadays the word populism evokes various negative emotions. Is not difficult to hear in it a tone of high-brow contempt toward the people, and the people reciprocate with hostility toward the “elites.” These feelings are symmetrical. Because of this symmetry, the word “populism” can be useful in describing certain psychosociological situations. But it is usually used without defining its content as a capacious bag in which to throw very different phenomena. Thus the word “populism” has become slander and not just a term. I am going to use this word, which is at home in everyday language, even if I dislike it. However, I will try to define it as I understand it. By populism I mean the politics and political rhetoric that express and try to utilize people’s hostility toward the “elites.” The objects of this popular hostility can be equally the elites of power or money, educated classes, or intellectual, moral, or professional authorities.

Populism entered the Polish political scene for the first time during the 1990 presidential elections. It was heard in part in the voice of Lech Wałęsa and his electoral committees created by the structures of Solidarity. With understandable relief, they welcomed the removal of the Union umbrella that had protected the “difficult reforms,” and they enthusiastically repeated the slogan “Balcerowicz must go.” The disappointment of the Union activists was even greater when, after Wałęsa’s victory (and with his endorsement), Leszek Balcerowicz remained deputy prime minister responsible for the economy and Minister of Finance in the new government. The relative success of Stan Tymiński in these elections was an equally important harbinger of the growing populism.[30] The “man from nowhere” who relied on disappointment with the reforms and sought the support of those who did not want Solidarity any longer but did not want the “return of communism” won 22 percent of the vote. Tymiński eliminated Tadeusz Mazowiecki in the first round. The fact that “our” prime minister did not win against Wałęsa was just a defeat, but Mazowiecki’s loss to the unknown Canadian demagogue was a real PR disaster. The Poles made Mazowiecki pay dearly for the Balcerowicz Plan.

The frustration and aggression of the millions of people hurt by the transition turned against the elites who had initiated the Great Change. At a crucial stage of the transition, the reformers used the myth of Solidarity as a political shield. This was effective, but nothing comes free of charge. The myth wore out, and the trauma of the people who felt cheated remained. They (today it should be said their parents and older siblings) were once the core of the great Solidarity. During martial law most of them gave up when confronted with violence, and not all of them voted in the 1989 elections. But after those elections, almost all of them felt the taste of victory—“Finally we won!” And then they started to lose. Their earnings decreased, they faced layoffs, and they lost ground in the community as their factories were eliminated. Their prospects for tomorrow and prestige in society were compromised. They had to ask, “What happened? We won, and now my friends and I have lost out. Who stole our victory? They did—they climbed to power on our backs, entered into murky deals with strangers, and now are stealing our national wealth.” The rushed privatization was largely a sell-out of national property at greatly lowered prices, which indeed created opportunities for abuse. In the eyes of the people this was hijacked privatization. It was enough to listen to the voices of the desperate people who had been laid off from bankrupt factories or who had not been paid for months on end. They gathered in front of important public buildings, the homes of the authorities, and chanted, “Thieves! Thieves!” Politicians did not invent this chant, but more than one joined the bandwagon.

The first truly populist party on the Polish political stage was the Self-Defense party. Its founder, Andrzej Lepper, was a born populist. A full-fledged popular demagogue, he began his career with speeches delivered at county fairs standing on a fruit box. He also blocked roads and dumped imported grain onto railroad tracks. Initially Self-Defense registered as a trade union, which can be seen as inspired by Solidarity. But in 2001 Self-Defense became a political party and triumphantly entered the Sejm. Standing on the Sejm podium in a fancy suit, Andrzej Lepper shouted to the representatives (members of the establishment) who had accused him of being crude, “You think this is Versailles? This is not Versailles anymore, because the people can’t afford bread!”

Populism can have different shades. It can exist on the right and on the left. Self-Defense’s discernible sentiment toward the People’s Poland, its flirtation with Lukashenko, wanting to keep the Church at a distance, and the practical and nonideological nature of its nationalism suggest a left-wing tint. However, right-wing populism dominates in Poland. Its most populous segment is not a party but a specific popular movement firmly anchored in many parishes. This is the Radio Maryja Family.[31] I do not have the time to waste to listen to this station regularly, but I happened to listen to one of their broadcasts from a rally in the striking Tormięs meat processing plant. The strike was declared as a desperate protest against the privatization that the workers rightly saw as a threat to their jobs. I listened to their words as if enchanted—to me this was a long unheard but familiar voice. It seemed as if time had moved back, and I was at one of those stormy meetings of workers in 1980. The great Solidarity gas been gone for a long time, but its remnants are scattered all over the country. Some of them were within the reach of Radio Maryja, who picked them up and used them toward its own ends.

Father Rydzyk’s radio is not a party, but its support, or lack thereof, influences the electoral results of right-wing parties. PiS and the League of Polish Families (LPR) benefited from this support in the 2005 elections.[32] After these elections, the liberal-democratic public intellectuals felt outraged by Jarosław Kaczyński’s creation of a coalition government with PiS, LPR, and Self-Defense. These circles felt that the Kaczyński brothers were disrespectful of the ethos of democratic opposition and the Żoliborz intelligentsia by bringing back to power populist Andrzej Lepper, and Roman Giertych, heir to the “endek” tradition.[33] I did not, and I still do not share this outrage, and I do not see the alliance between PiS, LPR, and Self-Defense as exotic. In my opinion it is a logical alliance between similar parties. The PiS founders early on noticed the cries of “Thieves! Thieves!” by the people hurt by the transition, and PiS developed their political project as a response to these desperate cries. “Yes, they are all thieves. We are the sheriffs and will deal with the thieves.” The outcome of their response was a call for a moral revolution to restore morality to be conducted by the state using appropriate means of enforcement. It needs to be acknowledged that the first person who wanted to build for the Fourth Republic and “pull (that is, first put on) the muzzle of democracy” was not Jarosław Kaczyński, but Jan Maria Rokita.[34] Rokita is still missed by some PO representatives, but after the 2005 elections and initial talks between PO and PiS, he realized that he would not be the one to decide “who would be arrested at six in the morning,” and he lost heart for the idea of an authoritarian state. Kaczyński, on the other hand, did not.

I do not think it makes sense to accuse Kaczyński with allying himself with a populist, especially in light of the political rhetoric that was then commonplace. This rhetoric was infused with epithets, such as “lie-elites,” “fake authorities,” and “lumpen-intelligentsia.”[35] Self-Defense party leaders often used crude language, but these were not his words, and it was not he who called the most eminent lawyers who criticized the repressive philosophy of the government “a front to defend criminals.” All these juicy epithets came from the authoritative mouth of Jarosław Kaczyński, who is an incomparable master of rhetoric and politics based on the hatred of the elites.

Another important characteristic of populism is authoritarianism, that is, the propensity toward a police state. PiS won the elections presenting itself as a party of righteous sheriffs, and after taking power, it embarked on a plan to remodel the state according to a sheriff’s philosophy. This would not have been possible without the support of a large part of society. To illustrate this, one should remember the conflict widely publicized at the time between Zbigniew Ziobro and the Commission for the Codification of the Penal Law.[36] Ziobro was then the Minister of Justice and prosecutor general; he also supervised special services and was Jarosław Kaczyński’s right hand. The commission consisted of the most eminent Polish lawyers. It opposed the governmental projects that undermined the principles of the rule of law in the state. Minister Ziobro did not argue but dismissed the commission chairman, Professor Stanisław Waltoś. When the entire commission resigned in response to this decision, Ziobro admonished the professors and explained that it was a shame they did not agree with a Justice Minister.

Many governmental ministers in communist Poland had thought similarly, but none dared to speak. Ziobro was the first—only in a democracy can a minister admonish professors as if they are children. Unlike Gomułka or Gierek, Kaczyński's government felt legitimization, and not just by their electoral victory but also when they lost their majority in parliament. PiS can be sure of its roots in the part of Polish society that is deeply disappointed with liberal democracy. After the conflict with the law professors, the mainstream media hauled Ziobro over the coals. But public opinion polls conducted shortly afterward left no doubt that this did not diminish his popularity. He was hurt later—when he parted ways with PiS.

PiS's unceasing popularity speaks volumes about the state of Polish society. The lasting division into PiS partisans and opponents reveals something different than the usual (and often changing) political choices. It is a cultural split. On one side there are people who are better educated, better off, and who evaluate the balance of the Polish transition and their own life prospects more positively. This is the enlightened Poland. To this Poland, critical opinions of PiS are convincing, the law professors' voices have a great gravity, and Minister Ziobro's decisions and words during the commotion about the law codification commission were contemptible and exasperating. However, on the other side, there is a great mass of people whom the liberal modernization of the country degraded and left behind. This is the People's Poland (not to be confused with the People's Republic of Poland). Arguments of the defenders of liberal democracy do not reach them. No media storm can tarnish their positive view of PiS. The People's Poland and the enlightened Poland are separated by an impenetrable communication barrier. No evaluation, argument, or information can cross from one side to the other. This is a breakdown of societal ties and has split Polish society into two parts alien or even hostile to one another. To the inhabitants of the People's Poland, the dwellers of the enlightened Poland are thieves, turncoats, and renegades of true Polishness. To the inhabitants of the enlightened Poland, the dwellers of the People's Poland are nothing but “mohair berets.”[37] We are a long way away from the brotherhood of the first Solidarity. Sometimes it looks as if we are losing the sense that we are one nation.

PiS put the slogan “Polska solidarna przeciw Polsce liberalnej” on its banners for its 2005 electoral campaign.[38] This was a succinct formula right on target regarding popular distresses and heralding improvements in the condition of millions of people hurt by the transition. More detailed pronouncements by leading victorious PiS politicians, especially Lech Kaczyński, who treated his own convictions and the demands of egalitarianism very seriously, helped stir the hopes of these people for change in social policy. Since 1989 nobody had thus addressed this part of the society. PiS had no competition. It was entering a territory untouched by any political actor and held this for a long time. The promise of prosocial policy from the main 2005 electoral slogan was not implemented, but even this did not damage the ties to this electorate. Zyta Gilowska, a merciless partisan of the neoliberal orthodoxy, became the face of the PiS government’s economic policy. The poster children for this policy were tax reform that brought relief to the richest taxpayers and the reduction of the obligatory retirement contributions that benefited employers but were disastrous for social security and the state budget.[39] The most observant inhabitants of the People’s Poland must have noticed this, but apparently they forgave their representatives these unfulfilled promises. The link that permanently ties the wronged people and PiS is not so much their hope for positive change as it is the ubiquitous negative reactions. The people hurt by the Great Change do not count as much on the fact that when PiS returns to power it will improve the conditions of everyday life; rather, they count that the next Kaczyński government will bring all those sons-of-bitches who made good during the transition to justice. The experience of 2005 to 2007 gives their hopes a solid ground.

PiS’s populist rhetoric, political imagination, and sense of mission are indeed consistent. We have already discussed populist rhetoric. PiS leaders’ political imagination is based on a cabal—criminal, mafia-like, and corruption-driven, or in any case deeply immoral, that enwraps society like a vicious spider web. PiS’s mission after returning to power will be to cleanse public life of inequity through a very bold application of police-prosecutorial instruments. Fantasies and obsessions related to this syndrome are still vivid in the hearts and minds of politicians of this orientation. We have seen this recently in the violent reactions of the people responsible for the so-called operation Mengele to the accusations by Judge Igor Tuleya against the Central Anti-Corruption Bureau (CBA) and the prosecutor's office.[40] Mariusz Kamiński, then the CBA head and now PiS vice chairman, revealed with great honesty the ideological motivation that according to him justified the use of "enhanced" police techniques. A so-called minesweeper investigation was conducted in the case that led to a guilty verdict against a cardiac surgeon who had accepted expensive gifts such as cigars or fine cognac from grateful patients.[41] The net was cast broadly. Thousands of witnesses were interrogated, mainly patients. At night they were yanked from their beds or apprehended like in a gangster movie. They were interrogated at night, and prosecutors threatened that they might end up as the accused or prompted them to testify in accordance with the investigation's scenario. The CBA obtained the names of the MSW hospital patients and medical records that were sealed under doctor-patient confidentiality through an officer who had seduced a nurse and convinced her to steal the documents. Thus the documents ended up in the hands of the investigators. Calling the operation by the name "Mengele" revealed its true character. At its source was a conviction about the vicious corrupted cabal of murderer-doctors who supposedly killed people in order to acquire and deal in transplantable organs. We can imagine the mass psychosis triggered by such revelations. A mountain gave birth to a mouse in the form of Dr. Garlicki's cigars and cognac. Still, Kamiński fiercely defended himself by claiming this was also corruption. Corruption was a dreadful plague, and combating it justified all the means that were used. Ziobro also spoke with great zeal in a similar vein. Only Jarosław Kaczyński had enough brains to remain silent. The prosecutor's office acted as a judge in its own case, and it declared that night interrogations were unnecessary but lawful.

Kaczyński's government collapsed as a result of the scandals related to the abuse of police power, especially the inept and botched provocation concocted by the CBA against Deputy Prime Minister Andrzej Lepper. Roman Giertych instantly realized that he was to be next in line, and his

League of Polish Families left the coalition together with Self-Defense, thus leaving PiS in an offside position. The loss of the parliamentary majority caused the government's dismissal and early elections. The enlightened Poland, frightened by the prospect of the Fourth Republic as a police state in the making, mobilized and removed PiS from power by voting en masse. This also secured PO's victory in the subsequent presidential and parliamentary elections. But this can soon change. The change of electoral preferences, visible in the polls, is more due to pessimism related to the world crisis and lack of trust in the future among the young people affected or threatened by unemployment than by amnesia or ignorance of the scandals from seven years ago. A social split still undermines our democracy. Calls for patience in the name of the common good find no response in the People's Poland. Its inhabitants say, "Your good is our harm." When the number of those who think like this increases, the democratic statehood can lose its stability. Many of my friends lament the scale of social inequality in the Third Republic while comforting themselves, "but at least we have freedom." It is not "but" but "still," and that is why we need to remember that it is a fragile reassurance. We are *still* free. Freedom without equality and brotherhood is an uncertain gift. Democracy is strong with its citizens' support. It may collapse when the citizens no longer agree about its basic tenets. Then the only thing left of freedom is freely flowing capital.

BLEMISHES IN THE BEAUTY OF INDEPENDENT POLAND

Every nation carries the hump of its history. The Poles are no exception, even if—like many other nations—we consider ourselves exceptional in that we underwent exceptionally hard experiences, while at the same time we shone with exceptional virtues. Thirty years ago I could not imagine that I would live to see an independent Poland, but this impossibility made her even more beautiful in my dreams. When she actually appeared, I was disappointed because she did not look as good as in my dream. This may be a silly complaint, but it needs to be somehow dealt with. At least the Russians are worse off. In the thousand-year-long history of their state, democracy only lasted for eight months—from the February 1917 revolution to the Bolshevik revolution. When the Soviet Union was collapsing seventy years later, no one remembered those eight months. The Russians knew democracy from foreign movies and books and not from their own experiences. In addition, for them the Great Change was much harder because it was connected with their multinational state falling apart, the breaking of cooperation links in the economy, and the loss of their position as superpower. They could not even comfort themselves (as Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and even the Poles have) that they threw off Moscow's yoke. When we lecture the Russians about parliamentary democracy, we need to consider that our parents knew and practiced it not for eight months but for eight years—from 1918 until the 1926 May Coup.[42] Afterward, under the authoritarian *Sanation* rule, civil liberties were still respected, even if they did not translate into the working of the executive branch.[43] But even this was not much. The memories of the older generations of Poles consist mainly of conformist behavior from the time of the People's Poland. The believers in muscular authority, who in the Third Republic were and still are in no short supply, have ready role models. Their mouths are full of rightist slogans, but their heads and hearts are plainly full of communism.

I am a part of the generation and social group that cannot deny responsibility for the present state of our republic. This account of my experiences inevitably must be an examination of conscience. This must be done on one's own account and for one's own conscience and not anyone else's. The beautiful face of free Poland has some ugly blemishes that have been carried on from our past—a past that is farther away, as well as recent, to which I and my friends and combatants have contributed.

A deep split carried on from martial law impacts the way political differences and debates are perceived in free Poland. Violence applied on such a scale necessarily had to leave trauma that poisons Polish democracy today. We still have a share in this, even if we can produce important attenuating circumstances in our defense. We were the side that was attacked, chased, beaten, and jailed. Sometimes our followers were killed deliberately. The commander who sent the special platoon to the Manifest Lipcowy mine, and then two days later to the Wujek mine without shields and batons and supplied only with live ammunition, acted with the clear intention to kill the striking miners.[44] It is irrelevant what calculation or internal political games led to this murder. The MO colonel who most likely had sent the platoon of murderers against the miners was later promoted to general. Today he is no longer alive. But the sentencing and jailing of the killers from that platoon was justified.[45] The so-called blind sword needs to be punished too—for reasons of prevention, that is, the dissuasive function of a penalty. In our times too there could be a politician who would order the police to fire on the participants in a peaceful protest. Officers who would get such orders must know that it would be criminal and should be afraid to carry them out. The example of the soldiers from the special platoon who served terms for killing in the Wujek mine should remind us that an order does not eliminate legal responsibility for a crime. It is good to remember this today.

The initiators of martial law wanted to scare those who could resist. Toward this end, they arranged a war-like spectacle for the national audience. It was as if they asked us to adopt a war vocabulary as well. This was as self-evident to us as it was useful. We called them occupiers, we excluded them from our national community, and we denied their Polishness. But this was not a real war. It was a cold war between the Poles. Moreover, that war has ended. The transfer of veterans' linguistic habits from a cold civil war to peace time always ends in toxic results. It spoils democracy, destroys the national community to which we belong together with the yesterday's enemies and their heirs, and affects both sides of the political conflict. Political entities that enter an electoral campaign must be treated equally, and they must respect this equality toward one another. This is the ABC of a democratic order.

Discrediting one's rivals because of their historical roots always ends in a backlash because degrading one's enemies degrades oneself. If in the confrontation with the SLD we reproach them because they are heirs of the PZPR, and we regard this aspect of the SLD identity as a stigma, it is easy to say, "You have less rights than others." But these words also mean that we (or "our people") have more rights. This is a slippery slope. We fought for freedom—therefore do we have the right, because of our former virtues, to slightly limit this freedom? Such things happened even before the appearance of the Fourth Republic's slogans and practices. Wałęsa was excellent in the role of leader of our common struggle for freedom. After assuming the presidency, he wanted to become a strongman and tried to hold the instruments of enforcement in his hands. This resulted in a scandal when at a dinner in the Drawsko Pomorskie training grounds he asked the top commanders of the Polish Army for a straw poll about the possible dismissal of the Minister of Defense.[46] I bring this up reluctantly because shortly afterward other candidates with strong-arm proclivities (who of course were also "ours") tried to besmirch and debase Wałęsa; alas the "Drawsko dinner" really happened. It is also true that Wałęsa gave his blessing to the Office for State Protection (UOP) officers who together with a Russian intelligence officer prepared the accusation of Prime Minister Oleksy for spying for Russia, as well as to the Minister of Internal Affairs who publicly presented the accusation in the Sejm.[47] The principal evidence against Oleksy was supposed to be a handwritten note prepared in the Warsaw Russian intelligence headquarters. The note evaluated the credibility of the information supplied to the Russians by "Agent O." The Russian officer who passed this note to his Polish colleagues suggested that "O" was Prime Minister Oleksy himself. The note clearly stated that the Polish Minister of Internal Affairs, Antoni Macierewicz, completely trusted "O." I wonder—does this seem like Oleksy and Macierewicz, who are known to be such lovers of the "Reds"? This would be perhaps the most comical slipup in the history of Polish special services, if not for the fact that forging accusations of spying is a Stalinist heirloom.

The experiences and emotions that shaped in the underground during the clandestine struggle with the dictatorship of the generals played an important role in the thinking and working of the post-Solidarity elite. These wartime experiences and emotions were loaded with the feeling of being wronged and a desire for revenge. We wanted to get back at them, soothing our powerless anger with the sweet dream about doing to them what they had been doing to us. A teacher fired from his school for union activity imagined with delight that his headmaster-Party member and harasser would lose his job after our victory and never be able to find a position. A Union activist who was visited, interrogated, and threatened by an SB lieutenant mused on the sweet thought that a time would come when we will turn all the officers of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (including doctors from the MSW hospital) into pariahs. Because at that time we were pariahs. Many among us would not go easy on the Party activists, at least those at the rank of secretary of a factory cell and up. As long as we were persecuted, the desire for revenge harmed only us because we were like a prisoner whose greatest dream is to change places with the warden. This got worse when it turned out that we won, and some of our people went into the parliament and government. The ties between the cofighters for a common cause and the heroes of the underground who supported one another following the rule "all for one and one for all" imperceptibly evolved into a caricature—a "republic of buddies." Grudges and obsessions from the underground surfaced as legislative initiatives.

Among the proposed laws, the Senate project on decommunization was the farthest reaching. It potentially would take away from all former Party activists the right to work as lawyers, headmasters, or directors in public schools or take teaching positions confirmed by university senates or academic departmental councils (from a factory-level Party organization secretary or member of a rural executive board on up). It would also deprive them of the right to vote. Luckily, the decommunization project did not pass in the Polish Sejm.

But lustration did win. I have no desire to go into the controversies about specific lustration laws and their practical functioning. A sea of ink has been spilled on this, and I do not need to go there. I will only touch upon an issue that was left aside for reasons incomprehensible to me—the impact of lustration as a public spectacle on the moral condition of the spectators.

I have no doubt that the burning desire to reveal who was an informer the moment the secret police documents became accessible stemmed from the veterans' mentality. In the underground, and to a certain extent in the 1970s democratic opposition, an enemy's informer was a threat to the others and to the success of the activities. I knew people who devoted much of their attention to figuring out who among us was a "rat." In many of our internal controversies, we used the shorthand that if someone had a different opinion and also tried to marginalize one or more people, then that person must be an informer. After our people took over power, these obsessions entered into public life and assumed the form of lustration. The justification was the need to protect the independent state from people susceptible to blackmail or prone to work for the Russian intelligence or, alternatively, higher moral ground. In fact, lustration was about the burning desire of yesterday's conspirators to finally catch their rats.

High-profile lustration cases serve as a kind of sport. Hunting a man has always provided excitement for participants and onlookers. The sight of a trapped evildoer or a sinner who unsuccessfully is trying to escape has always fascinated audiences. In the case of lustration, participation in or observation of the chase is a substitute for the examination of conscience. I am talking about people who in the People's Poland were adults, therefore they remember the dictatorship and can—but do not want to—think about the role they had to play in the past.

The communist dictatorship was not just terror based. The fact that it evoked fear was not the only or even most important reason for the citizens' complacency. The foundational stone of the dictatorship was conformism above all. Even the participants in the democratic opposition, before they crossed the Rubicon of rebellion, practiced the common rituals of submission. The average citizen of the People's Poland who did not identify with communism nonetheless did not see anything shameful in these rituals. But this complacency, even if fake, was the pillar of the regime's "strength and durability."[48] After the fall of communism, these household conformists obediently accepted the new criteria of political correctness and discovered that what they had considered normal in the People's Poland was in fact a terrible disgrace.

Life is uncomfortable with the burden of such a disgrace. One needs either to do a self-examination of conscience, a highly unpleasant procedure, or to unload the burden of guilt onto someone perceived to be worse. And there were so many people who were: members of the Party executive boards, servile journalists, and above all informers. Those cunning and deceitful people were seemingly with us, while in reality they were the eyes and ears for the wicked authorities. We must unmask and pillory them, and in this way we may cleanse ourselves from disgrace. Lustration is something akin to self-exorcism, as if we are expelling the Evil One. So let's join forces in expelling the unmasked rat. Whoever casts a stone first will be without sin, just like in the Gospels, only the other way around.

This is an age-old scapegoat ritual. I understand its function. In the medieval period this ritual was one of the pillars of traditional cultures in the barbaric world. In our own times this ritual is deeply objectionable, above all because it is a way to escape the examination of conscience (of course one’s own) and obscures this evasion with duplicitous moralizing. The overwhelming power of psychosocial needs has made it impossible for us to avoid this trap. As I examine our legacy, I regard this as one of the reasons for shame.

Finally, lustration fever fuels the mood of ubiquitous suspicion that leads to the acceptance of an all-encompassing control of the citizens’ past and present. And ubiquitous suspicion (of course not just lustration based) and acquiescence to ubiquitous control are ideal grounds on which Poland can grow into a police state. Its kernels are already present in our life, and they are not only reasons for shame but also for anxiety about the future of our recently regained freedom.

The legacy of past times endures in the thinking by politicians, policemen, and even average citizens. “The womb he [the ape] crawled from still is going strong.”[49] We need to be vigilant.

The Poles’ emotional attitudes toward their neighboring nations is burdened with memories of suffered wrongs and inflicted wounds (of course those inflicted on us and not those inflicted by us) and the balance sheet of the dead and murdered. It is easy to rekindle this smoldering enmity and desire to even the accounts. Sometimes politicians do this for immediate electoral gains. But such gains turn into national losses. Relations with neighboring countries depend on the psychological fabric of relations between the nations. For every Polish government—no matter whether the prime minister is Kaczyński or Tusk—the rekindled hostility toward the Russians, Germans, or Ukrainians is like a ball and chain that makes it impossible to arrange mutual economic and political relations in the best national interest. The cost for this is steep.

Nationalism is returning to Poland and Europe in a form that has not been seen for a long time. It reminds one of fascist ideologies and movements. Nothing is exactly the same as it was in the Weimar Republic, but we cannot deny that there are similarities and pretend there is no problem. The Great Crisis of the 1930s contributed to that fascism; today the global crisis, the general uncertainty of tomorrow, lack of life prospects, and the frustration of the youth are conducive to fascism's contemporary counterparts. In this respect, too, Brecht's warning from the conclusion of Arturo Ui seems appropriate: "The womb he crawled from still is going strong."

The state of mind in Poland causes a concern for serious public intellectuals. It seems that a large part of the society is succumbing to paranoid delusions. The belief in the Smolensk nonsense about a plot, or two explosions, or three surviving passengers is growing.[50] Rational arguments do not work, and not surprisingly—we are not dealing with a rational attitude but with something akin to a mass psychosis. We can see at its roots the frustrations and fears of people who feel that they have lost and been cheated. They are desperately seeking those who are responsible for their situation. Poland is afflicted with the syndrome of misused trust—the aftermath of the Solidarity myth that had been utilized and exhausted as a cover for the Great Change. This is also a part of the bill for the transition. We should not pretend that it has nothing to do with us.

I realize that my friends may reject my bitterness in this summary. They had been hurt by what I wrote about the Polish transition twenty years ago in my book *Where to Go from Communism?*[51] Some of them were Jacek Kuroń's students and still influenced by his charisma. It must have hurt them that Jacek reassessed his participation in the post-Solidarity governments. He blamed himself (excessively in my opinion) and no one else. In 1994 he wrote that the Solidarity movement—or rather its symbolic potential—had been "destroyed by the government and the administration between 1989 and 1993. . . . The fall of real socialism did not bring workers freedom or empowerment. To the contrary, they not only lost their privileges, but also their prestige." Ever since I can remember, Jacek and I shared values. For us, workers were a very important reference point, and we felt that "loyalty toward strangers" applied primarily to them. No wonder that we have summed up our experiences similarly. Our friends who became involved in building the Third Republic's democratic order believe that the Republic needs protection from her enemies, and we should not cast stones.

I too believe we need to protect it, but self-censorship ill serves this ill. The social plagues that deform and eat into our regained freedom are mortal dangers that should not be glossed over; rather, they should be revealed to prevent worse developments. We are not divided by our attitudes toward free Poland, but we differ in many matters that need to be discussed.

NOTES

1. Trans. FLV.
2. The Solidarity Citizens' Committee (Polish: Komitet Obywatelski Solidarność, KO "S," initially Komitet Obywatelski przy Lechu Wałęsie, the Citizens' Committee with Lech Wałęsa) was established in December 1988 as a semi-legal advisory body that after the Round Table talks evolved into the body that prepared the 1989 elections.
3. Magdalenka is shorthand for the MSW retreat in Magdalenka, a small town near Warsaw. It was the place of informal working meetings between the top authorities and the core leadership of Solidarity during the Round Table negotiations. There were thirteen such meetings between September 16, 1988, and April 4–5, 1989.
4. The PAX Association (Polish: Stowarzyszenie PAX) was a communist-aligned Catholic organization created in 1947 to undermine support for the Church in Poland. The Christian Social Association (Polish: Chrześcijańskie Stowarzyszenie Społeczne, ChSS) was a splinter organization of PAX created in 1957. The Polish Catholic-Social Association (Polish: Polski Związek Katolicko-Społeczny, PZKS) was a Catholic social-political organization established in 1981. Each of these organizations was represented in the Sejm by four or five delegates.
5. The Citizens' Parliamentary Caucus (Polish: Obywatelski Klub Parlamentarny, OKP) consisted of 161 representatives and senators elected from the KO "S" to the "negotiated" Sejm of 1989–1991.
6. Jeffrey Sachs (b. 1954) is an American economist. He worked as an economic advisor to Bolivia in the 1980s and then to Poland, Slovenia, Estonia, and the USSR/Russia in the 1990s.
7. *Popiwek* (an acronym of PPWW, short for Polish: Podatek od ponadnormatywnych wypłat wynagrodzeń, the above-standard wage tax)

was introduced in Poland in 1984, but it is primarily associated with the Balcerowicz Plan. It was used to fight hyperinflation. It involved state-controlled wage levels tied to the level of inflation and taxed companies that exceeded the caps.

8. Adam Michnik, “Wasz prezydent, nasz premier,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, July 3, 1989.

9. Karol Modzelewski, “Nie róbmy rządu, nie idźmy stąd,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, July 6, 1989.

10. Krzysztof Skubiszewski (1926–2010) was a scholar of international law; he served as Minister of Foreign Affairs between 1989 and 1993.

11. Tadeusz Mazowiecki, “Spiesz się powoli” (“Hurry up slowly”), *Tygodnik Solidarność*, July 14, 1989.

12. Adam Michnik, “Karol z krainy rogatych dusz: Opowieść o przyjaźni i rewolucji” (“Karol of the Land of Hell-Risers”), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, June 27 and 29, 2011.

13. Witold Trzeciakowski (1926–2004) was an economist; he served as a minister without portfolio in Mazowiecki’s government between 1989 and 1991.

14. Jan Krzysztof Bielecki (b. 1951) is an economist; he served as prime minister between January and December 1991. Jerzy Buzek (b. 1940) is a chemist and politician; he served as prime minister between 1997 and 2001, and he was the president of the European Parliament between 2009 and 2012.

15. Michael Bruno, *Stabilization and Reform in Eastern Europe: A Preliminary Evaluation* (Washington: International Monetary Fund, 1992).

16. For *popiwek*, see chapter 9, note 7. The word closely resembles the words *podpiwek* (a kind of Polish-Lithuanian root beer) and *napiwek* (a tip).

17. Andrzej Lepper (1954–2011) was the leader of the Self-Defense of the Republic of Poland (Samoobrona Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej, SRP), a populist, agrarian, and nationalist political party and trade union founded by Lepper in 1992. Its platform combined left-wing populist economic policies with religious conservative social policies.

18. CIT—Corporate Income Tax.

19. Jacek Bocheński (b. 1926) is a novelist and essayist.

20. Aleksander Małachowski (1924–2004) was a politician and political writer. The phrase “reform through ruin” appears in his essay “Oszukaliśmy

naród” (“We Have Cheated the Nation”) published in the weekly *Przegląd* on September 28, 2003.

21. The author is referring to a quotation from the eighteenth-century satire *Monachomachia* by Ignacy Krasicki, “True virtue fears no criticism.”

22. Waldemar Kuczyński, *Solidarność u władzy: dziennik 1989–1993* (Gdańsk: Europejskie Centrum Solidarności, 2010).

23. Leszek Miller (b. 1946) is a left-wing politician; he served as prime minister between 2001 and 2004.

24. The flat tax was a subject of public debate in Poland during the 2005 parliamentary election campaign. After the victory in the 1997 election, the Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS) forged a center-right coalition with the Freedom Union (UW) and created a government headed by Jerzy Buzek as prime minister.

25. The “war at the top” (Polish: *wojna na górze*) is a popular name for the conflict between Lech Wałęsa and Tadeusz Mazowiecki’s government in the 1990s.

26. In 1994 the Democratic Union merged with the Liberal Democratic Congress into the Freedom Union (Polish: Unia Wolności, UW). The Center Alliance (Polish: Porozumienie Centrum, PC) was a right-wing Christian-Democratic party led by Jarosław Kaczyński, active in the early 1990s; it was a predecessor to the Law and Justice party (Polish: Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS).

27. Labor Solidarity (Polish: Solidarność Pracy, SP) was a left-wing political association turned party. In the 1991 parliamentary elections, the SP won four seats, and in 1992 it merged with several other left-wing organizations into the Labor Union (Polish: Unia Pracy, UP), which still exists as a minor Social-Democratic party.

28. The Polish Social-Democratic Union (Polish: Polska Unia Socjaldemokratyczna) was one of the successor parties to the PZPR; it existed between 1990 and 1992 when it merged into the Labor Union.

29. The author is referring to a book by Piotr Sztompka, *Trauma wielkiej zmiany: Społeczne koszty transformacji* (Warszawa: ISP PAN, 2000).

30. Stanisław “Stan” Tymiński (b. 1948) is a Polish-Canadian businessman and sometime-populist politician in Poland and Canada.

31. The Radio Maryja Family (Polish: Rodzina Radia Maryja) is a social movement affiliated with the ultraconservative Catholic radio station Radio

Maryja, founded and led by the Redemptorist priest Tadeusz Rydzyk.

32. The League of Polish Families (Polish: Liga Polskich Rodzin, LPR) is a minor far-right nationalist-Catholic party whose ideology draws from the tradition of the interwar National Democracy (ND, or *endecja*) party.

33. Roman Giertych (b. 1971) is a celebrity lawyer, politician, and one-time leader of the LPR; he is the grandson of the ND politician Jędrzej Giertych (1903–1992) who in interwar Poland was known for his anti-Semitism and profascist sympathies. An "endek" is a member of the ND (or *endecja*) party.

34. Jan Maria Rokita (b. 1959) was a student activist and peace activist during martial law. In free Poland he was politically active until 2010, serving as a PO representative in the Sejm between 1989 and 2007 and performing various governmental functions. The Fourth Republic, see chapter 3, note 26.

35. Lumpen-intelligentsia (Polish: *lumpeninteligencja*) is a word patterned after lumpenproletariat, the term used primarily in Marxist theory for the amorphous social group below the proletariat that in English-language scholarship has sometimes been called "social scum."

36. The Commission for the Codification of the Penal Law (Polish: Komisja Kodyfikacyjna Prawa Karnego) was established in 2004 by Prime Minister Marek Belka; it was chaired by the prominent lawyer and law historian Stanisław Waltoś (b. 1932) until his dismissal in February 2006, after which the entire commission resigned. Zbigniew Ziobro (b. 1970) served as the Minister of Justice and the prosecutor general between 2005 and 2007 and again from 2015.

37. "Mohair berets" (Polish: *moherowe berety*) is a satirical term designating people with ultraconservative Catholic views, predominantly elderly and poor people, easily stirred to religious-patriotic causes. Probably first used in 2004, this phrase refers to the stereotype of elderly women from this social group wearing characteristic mohair or mohair-like hats.

38. Lit. "Solidaristic Poland versus liberal Poland."

39. Zyta Gilowska (b. 1949) is an economist and politician; she served as deputy prime minister and the Minister of Finance in 2006 and 2007.

40. The author refers to the so-called case of Mirosław G., that is, Dr. Mirosław Garlicki, head of the cardiac surgery ward in the Warsaw MSW

hospital. Garlicki was arrested in February 2007 and presented with criminal charges including “possibly premeditated” killing and bribery. The case was presented to the media as a poster case by Minister of Justice Zbigniew Ziobro and the CBA head, Mariusz Kamiński. In May of that year *Gazeta Wyborcza* revealed that the CBA investigation against Garlicki was code named “Mengele” (from the name of the notorious Nazi doctor). Eventually Garlicki was sentenced in 2013 for bribery to a one-year suspended sentence and a fine. Judge Igor Tuleya presided over Garlicki’s final trial, and in his reasons for the judgment he condemned the methods employed by the CBA during the investigation.

41. A “minesweeper investigation” (Polish: *śledztwo trałowe*) consists of seeking offenses and offenders among a large number of people in hopes that eventually something will be discovered.

42. The 1926 May coup d’état (Polish: *przewrót majowy*) was carried out by Marshal Józef Piłsudski. It resulted in the installation of a *Sanacja* government.

43. Sanation (Polish: *Sanacja*, from Lat. “sanatio,” healing) was a political movement in interwar Poland. It took its name from Piłsudski’s call to heal Polish politics. *Sanacja* advocated for authoritarian rule. It remained in power between the coup d’état of 1926 and 1935.

44. The author is referring to the pacification of the strikes in December 1981.

45. Their complicated multistage trial took place between 1991 and 2009 and consisted of more than one hundred court hearings. Eventually the platoon commander was sentenced to eleven years in prison. Fourteen of his officers received sentences of either two and a half or three years in prison. The actual prison terms were cut in half by an amnesty.

46. This event took place on September 30, 1994.

47. The Office for State Protection (Polish: Urząd Ochrony Państwa) was Poland’s state intelligence agency between 1990 and 2002, when it was split into two new agencies.

48. From the phrase, “Justice is the pillar of the strength and durability of the Republic,” by a renaissance political writer Andrzej Frycz-Modrzewski (1503–1572).

49. The final words of *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, by Bertolt Brecht, trans. Ralph Mannheim (London: Methuen, 2000), 99.

50. On April 10, 2010, a plane carrying a Polish delegation on their way to the commemoration of the Katyń massacre (chapter 1, notes 3 and 4) crashed near Smolensk. All ninety-six passengers, including president of Poland Lech Kaczyński, top military commanders, and government officials were killed. Although the cause of the crash has been determined to be bad weather combined with poor logistics and judgment on the side of the flight organizers, numerous conspiracy theories were forwarded and endorsed by Jarosław Kaczyński and Antoni Macierewicz, among others.

51. Karol Modzelewski, *Dokąd od komunizmu?* (Warszawa: BGW, 1993).

Epilogue

I am not going to end this book with a political message. I know a few things about the past, and I do not believe that things happen according to some “law of history.” Readers can draw conclusions from my political experiences themselves. I hope they will be people of different worldviews and values, and their conclusions will differ from mine and each other.

But there is a category of readers whom I would like to address—young people who are inclined to rebellion against social injustice. Their internal imperative pushes them to fight for a better world, and they will try to fix the social order in free Poland that we are about to leave to them or even overthrow it in order to realize their own ideals. They are surely aware that Poland’s internal structure is now a part of the global structure, and any rebellion must have global implications. This will not stop them because they will want to change the world. I was like them, and I think I owe them some explanations.

I took the title for this book from Vladimir Mayakovsky’s poem “Left March.”[1] Mayakovsky was a brilliant poet-futurist who harnessed his great talent to the service of the Bolshevik revolution and in 1930 ended his life with a revolver. “Left March” was not among his best poems, but the metaphor “We will ride the jade of history to death” captured the Bolshevik philosophy of history. Every revolution tries to saddle and tame this beast, but it is a difficult rodeo. The jade of history is a wild and untamed mustang. One can jump on her back, or even stay a while, but she is impossible to manage. Ultimately she always takes us where we neither planned nor wanted to end up.

I am a second-generation revolutionary. My father was a true communist. He worked for the sake of the proletarian revolution in which he deeply believed, first in interwar Poland and then among Polish miners in France. His clash with reality occurred in the Moscow Lubyanka prison. I do not know how he coped with his disillusionment as he built the People’s Poland with others like himself. He never talked about this, but sometimes I sensed a skepticism in his vague statements. His disappointment must have been much greater than the frustration that I or Jacek Kuroń felt when free Poland was turning away from the ideals of equality and brotherhood. Still, we felt embarrassed when asked if this was what we were fighting for. The coming generation of revolutionaries should also prepare for such embarrassment.

I do not encourage or discourage their rebellion. They will be beaten, but this is not a reason to give up. Every generation has the right to get beaten—this is the only human right that no regime can ever take away. I certainly will not join them because I am no longer strong or healthy enough for the barricades. Besides, I know too much. A revolution is either impossible or too costly, and in any case, it never ends the way we want. A revolutionary cannot know this. Ignorance gives wings and allows one to do impossible things that change the world. Disillusionment, or dissatisfaction with the outcome, comes later. But that is another story.

Many of the future revolutionaries to whom I address these words are nonbelievers. I am not a believer either. Yet at the end I still say, “Godspeed.” Godspeed to all of us.

NOTE

1. Some English renditions of “Left March,” including the most accessible one by Alec Vagapov on Wikipedia (https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Left_March), (mis)translate the Russian phrase *клячу историю загоним* as “We’ll ruin the jade of the past.” Actually Mayakovsky used the word *история* (history) referring not to the past but to “history in the making.”

I Had Two Souls

A Conversation with Karol Modzelewski[1]

Karol Modzelewski: Usually at this time of day I am feeding the cats in a neighborhood community garden. Every day I walk a mile there and back. This is how my wife gets me to get some exercise. The cats are wild, but they're not afraid of me since they know they're going to be fed. I keep coming back because of the way they look at me.

Donata Subbotko : What else do you do now?

KM: I am retired.

DS: Is that good or bad?

KM: People experience a crisis when they retire, and they get confused. Retirement makes you sick. I've already gone through this though.

DS: Is there anything more you would like to do?

KM: I managed to write *Riding History*. . . . My wife talked me into it. For the most part I have managed to do everything I wanted to in my life.

DS: So how would you describe yourself?

KM: A historian, a rebel, a man of Solidarity, but of the Solidarity that no longer exists. I had two souls. I always wanted to be a humanities scholar—a historian. But I was needed to throw a punch, I was there. Sorry for this boxer talk. For me throwing a punch was a necessity, whereas being a historian was an inner need. When I was not called on to throw punches, I lived in the Middle Ages. History for me is like making friendships with people and communities that are long gone and finding ways to communicate with them. I know it sounds like a séance.

DS: No, I like it.

KM: I was lucky to be able to do both things in turns, to be, as Jacek Kuroń put it, a Sunday politician. Communication with people was always important to me. I became a university instructor when I was quite young. Solidarity was a political movement, but really it was a revolution, both in the psychological and social sense. I'm talking about the Solidarity that exists in my memory, in my guts, in my blood. It was probably the most important experience of my life.

Now I finally want to be useful to my family. I was not really successful in this. I spent time in prison, I was divorced more than once, and I did not raise my daughter or son. I would like to be closer to my youngest grandson who lives in Kraków. Different things become important for an old man than for a young one who thinks he can conquer the world. I don't want to write another book because I would screw it up.

DS: Why?

KM: I've got my share of years, and at my age it's normal to get sick. This is to be accepted humbly. I have had two strokes. One when I was writing *Riding History*, the other, a small one, in 2016. My ability to work is diminished. I know what I would like to write, but the writing itself is hard.

DS: The second stroke—was there any reason for it?

KM: I was involved in a protest that went awry. And I got angry. Not at the opponents, but at friends. I don't want to say any more about it.

DS: Wouldn't be better to quit politics altogether?

KM: Easier said than done.

My short-term memory has gotten worse. A stroke leaves scars just like a heart attack, only inside the brain. This is nothing out of the ordinary at my age. But sometimes I curse it.

DS: But you take care of yourself, don't you?

KM: I sleep a lot. I have discovered I like sleep.

DS: Do you dream?

KM: Yes—recently about prison. About the wardens.

DS: The wardens?

KM: Yes, one with red hair. He supervised a visit I had with my mother. This was in 1971, in the Wołów prison, when Jacek Kuroń and my conditional release was brewing. Józef Tejchma's office called up my mother. Earlier at a Polish Writers' Union meeting she had asked Tejchma how the new Party leadership intended to deal with Kuroń and me. He said that Mrs. Modzelewska would receive a response in the proper time and manner. But then they called her from his office to discuss the particulars of our possible release.

My mother told me this during her visit. The red-haired warden listened, and later told me, "What your mother was saying about Tejchman was really interesting." He didn't say Tejchma, but Tejchman. He turned it into a Jewish name. He was not far off—Tejchma's name was of German origin, even if he himself was from Markowa, a village between Rzeszów and Łańcut. My lovely daughter-in-law is also from there.

DS: So do you see him often?

KM: Alas, rarely. Once I was in the Bookseller's Club in Warsaw introducing some famous people to my daughter-in-law. I said, "Kasia, this is Mr. Tejchma who was once the Minister of Culture. Thanks to him we were able to see *Man of Marble* instead of it being put on a shelf by the censors." She asked, "Tejchma, from Markowa?" and they started talking.

I met him shortly after my release from prison in 1971. I told him, "I hope you don't mind me saying something personal—I don't hold on to the bad memories about those who locked me up, yet I always remember those who let me go." He smiled. I have many memories from Wołów, the prison for recidivists, even if my first prison was Mokotów (and the last one too). But if worse comes to worse, now they would lock me up somewhere else because the investigative prison on Rakowiecka Street is supposed to be converted into a museum.

DS: Do you think they will lock people up again?

KM: I think they will. Along with trumped up corruption charges, or other fake or concocted accusations. Perhaps even in openly political cases. If their rule lasts long enough, and if they manage to develop the mechanisms of a police state, they will put them to work. It depends on the scale of resistance in society. If the people make moves against them, they might start firing at crowds. And they also might use those morons who don't know how to shoot.

DS: You mean the Territorial Defense?[2]

KM: Yes. The authorities likely think they will be able to keep them in check. I don't think they will.

DS: So how should we think about people?

KM: Nothing has changed. We should love them, but not too much.

DS: Do you?

KM: I like people. I think there's a mix of the devil and angel inside everyone. Like in Agnieszka Osiecka's song, "The angel sold the devil his angry soul / and they created a hell with a dollop of heaven.”

DS: What kind of image of today’s Poland do you think will be preserved in history? More hell, or heaven?

KM: It depends what kind of historians will write it.

DS: Let’s assume they are objective.

KM: You can’t write without some bias, and even if you could, all writing has some implied value system. All scholarship is organized around some system of values, even physics. A historian deals with a mass of information. I am not talking about “facts,” because a fact is already a construct—but about information that is meaningless by itself. To acquire meaning, information needs to be selected and constructed into a proposition. This selection and construction is done on the basis of our evaluation of its relevance. The very evaluation of relevance is in itself a value judgment. Nothing is important because of itself but because of some norm or purpose. In the humanities, these value systems are subjective, and they are not the same for everyone.

DS: Will our history be rewritten?

KM: I believe nothing will really come of it, it will be rejected—the same as the version of history that the communists tried to introduce. But I think they will manage to demoralize many historians. Corruption—since writing to suit the authorities is a kind of corruption—is always demoralizing. You are asking a professional about his opinion on the prostitution of his trade.

DS: Is it hard to turn back once you’ve gone down the path?

KM: It’s hard to retract what one has written and to regain the respect of one’s peers who would consider such a historian a hack who got taken. On his own initiative—nobody forced him to become a hack.

DS: On your own scale, how would you rate the present time?

KM: Do you want me to rip into [Jarosław] Kaczyński? That would be easy. But I don’t feel like it.

DS: I am asking your perspective as a historian.

KM: I am not afraid of giving my perspective as a historian, but am afraid I may be tempted to delve into Kaczyński’s soul. From my slight acquaintance with him, I can tell you that, if needed, he can switch from the language of ideology to the language of cold pragmatism in a heartbeat. But I don’t want to draw his psychological portrait.

DS: What will be left of him, and what of us?

KM: “Iron scrap and the hollow, mocking laugh of generations,” as Tadeusz Borowski put it.[3] Damn it, why do I remember these things?

DS: It’s a well-known quote—and very pretty. Sorry, I forgot you don’t like the word “pretty.”

KM: “Pretty” is a taboo word in the “grypsera.” If someone is “pretty,” it means he must be fucked, and that is . . .

DS: . . . not pretty.

KM: Exactly.

DS: From today’s perspective, do you regret all those years in prison?

KM: I think I did what I was supposed to do in my life. That is, I got involved only when there was no other choice, except for the first time, that is, in 1956, when I followed the childish idea of being a revolutionary, conspirator, and insurgent. I only got involved when I thought I would be a jerk if I didn’t do something. In such situations my adrenaline surges. The monster I am fighting exposes himself, which means I have to fight back. If I don’t hit him in the face, I’m nothing. But when I hit him, I have to take a blow myself, and the cycle begins. Is this clear?

DS: Yes.

KM: Especially when the adversary makes himself morally vulnerable to a blow, and you can really hurt him—for me this is an irresistible temptation. I have to do it. It is an ethical enticement. I had my second stroke because of this—because of a wasted opportunity.

DS: Have you ever fought?

KM: For a joke my cellmates in prison taught me how to head-butt. I paid for this later with terrible lumbago in my neck. They held up a straw mattress, and I was supposed to hit it with my head while they pronounced the names of Party dignitaries. Apparently I hit Moczar the hardest. This move was a well-known street gang technique called *z baniaka*; Stanisław Grzesiuk described it in detail.[4] You hit your opponent’s face with your forehead near his eye sockets. Or you hit him on the chest; then it is easier to take him down.

DS: Have you ever used this training?

KM: No, but I still have some time left.

DS: You like quiet, yet you have quite a lot of CDs.

KM: Sometimes I listen to them, especially when my wife puts on Magda Umer.[5] Then I move closer. I love Umer's performances of Agnieszka Osiecka's songs. I like Osiecka, especially "The Yellow Flames of Leaves" sung by Łucja Prus and "The Skalds."[6] If my wife puts on Roman Kołakowski, I listen to him too. I love his song "Lwów Is Abroad": "There are Polish homes in German Breslau / Which is my home town / While Lwów is abroad / With its melodious language and old movies/ It is a mystery to me / A love that never was."

DS: You used to live in Wrocław, but you probably love Moscow more than Lwów.

KM: I love Wrocław the best. I like Moscow because of Okudzhava. I used to like his song "Master Grisha"; it resounded with my subversive thinking. His "Song about My Executed Father" is also a favorite of mine. His father was executed by a firing squad in 1937; his mother was arrested after Yezhov's fall, under Beria. She went to see Beria to ask for the release of her husband—like her husband, Beria was from Georgia. Beria comforted her, but at night he sent his people to arrest her, and she spent eighteen years in the camps. The song starts, "O chem ty uspel' peredumat', otets rasstrelannyi moi / kagda ia chagnul s gitaroj, rasstrielannyi, no zhyvoij?" ("What did you think about, my executed father / when I went away with my guitar, executed but still alive?"). Did you know that I can sing more in tune in Russian? Especially the songs from the Great Patriotic War. Apparently they taught me well in the orphanage.

DS: Can you sing for me?

KM: Good Lord!

Vstavai, strana ogromnaia,
Vstavai na smertnyi boi!
S fashistskoi siloi tiomnoiu,
S proklatoiu ordoi.[7]

I am not crazy about the Alexandrov Choir—it is way too operatic, but this song is beautiful.

DS: Does this mean that you sometimes sing?

KM: In the bathroom, when nobody can hear. I mostly sing Russian protest songs like Vysotsky and Okudzhava.[8] “The whole earth is like a copper coin / While somewhere in the sky / Gods circle high above my head.” I think this poem by Okudzhava, “My Gods,” is wonderfully translated into Polish by Seweryn Pollak. I used it as the inscription to *Riding History*. The translation is even better than the original. Okudzhava is hard to translate because his poetry is very subtle. For instance, my favorite song is “Samaia glavnaia pesenka,” or “The Main Song”: “Navernoe, samuiu lutshuiu / na etoi zemnoi staranie / khazhu ia i pesenku slushaiu / ona shevelnulas’ vo mne // ona eshcho ochen’ nespetaia / ona zelena, kak trava . . .” (“Indeed, the very best / in this earth / [is] the song that I listen to when walking. / It moves inside me // It is still unsung / it is as green as the grass”). Such beautiful words.

DS: And you complain about your memory.

KM: My long-term memory is fine, and I learned this a long time ago. My short-term memory is an issue when I am saying something, and suddenly I think about something completely different. Then that’s it—it’s completely erased.

DS: Why is this song so special to you? Is it because it is about something that no one can ever achieve?

KM: It’s about something that one strives for but never gets. Jacek Kuroń also liked it. In 1964 we were locked up for forty-eight hours for preparing a pamphlet critical of the communist system in Poland. We were held in some offices on the top floor of the Ministry of Internal Affairs building. There were bars on the window, a couch, a desk, and two chairs—enough to interrogate a suspect and allow him to catch some sleep at night. Ten of us were locked up, including Bernard Tejkowski, whom we suspected of being an informer, and Andrzej Mazur, who certainly was an informer. We were not completely isolated, as the toilets were in the hallway. Once when Jacek was being escorted to the toilet, I was singing “The Main Song.” He was happy because he saw it as a sign that I was not breaking down.

KM: It is not well known that when we already were in prison, Franciszek Szlachcic, a Citizens’ Militia general (by all appearances it was he), tried to talk Jacek into renouncing our letter. Jacek told me about this after our release. One day in Mokotów prison he was given a pressed shirt instead of prison garb, and they took him to the interrogation room. There were two people there, his interrogating officer and a civilian, an older balding man. This man says, "Good morning, comrade Kuroń." Jacek responds, "I do not think we are in the same party." The other guy smiles, "Well, comrade Kuroń, you know, the most important thing is to be for socialism. You see, the letter you wrote—and I won't go into your intentions—is very harmful. If it falls into the hands of the centers of ideological subversion abroad, it could. . . . So the main thing is for them not to get hold of it. We are willing to make a deal—we will let you go, and you will retrace your steps and take back the letter from those to whom you gave it. You turn all the copies in to us. We already have six copies, but we know there are more. How many are there? Oh, my apologies—as a wolf goes to the woods, a policeman is always a policeman—disregard my question. You will retrieve the letter and give it to us, and there will be no trial, and no prison for you. What do you say, comrade Kuroń?" I am repeating this exchange exactly as Jacek described me, except that it was very vivid in his telling.

DS: How did he react?

KM: He responded that he was not by himself in the case but together with Modzelewski. Szlachcic said, "Very good." And he told the investigator, "Comrade Captain, please provide an unsupervised meeting for comrades Kuroń and Modzelewski." At this point, Jacek remembered what he had been taught during a party training—if your enemy praises you, it means you did something wrong. So he said, "I have changed my mind." Szlachcic became angry, "Well, comrade Kuroń, we wanted to be good to you, but now we have no choice." Quite a story, isn't it?

DS: When did you see Jacek for the last time?

KM: When he was dying in 2004, I was at a conference in Germany on the legal system of the barbarians. I managed to deliver my paper, and then Danuta Kuroń called me in my hotel room, "Jacek died last night." I changed my plane ticket so I could attend the funeral.

Before that we had seen each other around 2002, shortly after my son Adam reappeared in my life. Adam had come to my apartment, and my wife Małgorzata went for a walk to give us space to talk and deal with our emotions. She came back freezing cold, with red knees. Danuta Kuroń showed up, and Małgorzata introduced Adam to her, “This is Karol’s son.” Danuta looked at me, “Really?” I said, yes, he’s my son. She was stunned and went at once to tell Jacek. Why is this important? Because later I took Adam to visit Jacek in the hospital. Afterward Adam told everyone, “I got sick hearing about how they agreed on everything.”

DS: Wait a moment, how old was your son?

KM: In 2002 he was twenty. He was born in January 1982.

DS: When did you first meet him?

KM: Only then, when he was twenty.

DS: How come?

KM: It’s a thorn in my side. Very difficult. But all in all it ended up OK. His mother is a person with a tough character. She’s very independent, a feminist, and very good looking. I was really attracted to her. Our son was born during martial law when I was in prison. His mother left for Germany with him, then she returned and then left again, but her son stayed in Poland with his grandfather. We were not in contact. It is a delicate issue.

DS: We don’t need to talk about it, or about your wife.

KM: We weren’t married—it did not cross my mind. Neither hers.

DS: Is his name after Adam Michnik ?

KM: She named him Adam. But my grandson’s middle name is Jacek. He was baptized in Kraków by my friend Józef Puciłowski, a Dominican friar, who at the altar asked if he was named after Jacek Kuroń. He even turned to me and said, “Karol, is that correct?”

I have also a daughter Ewa and two adult granddaughters. For the first six years of her life, Ewa did not have a father—between my first and second prison terms I was only home for seven months. This took its toll on my personal life. There is nobody among my colleague-criminals whose families did not fall apart. This is one of the factors of poor prospects—prisoners have nothing to return to.

DS: But your children admire you, don’t they?

KM: Rather appreciate me, perhaps. My son liked *Riding History*. He read it before it was published. He helped me with it—he taught me how to use the computer. He is an IT person.

DS: Your life got quite screwed up.

KM: That's what it looks like.

DS: What are your earliest memories?

KM: Shoveling snow with a little shovel. Together with other children I dug little corridors around wooden three-story buildings. This was in the "Woodland Spa" orphanage, some thousand kilometers east of Moscow. I was sent there in 1941. Or another image—the janitor at the orphanage shooting a crow with a double-barrel shotgun. The gun fascinated me, but there was something evil in the dead bird.

I also remember peeping at the girls. We marveled at the absence of a certain body part that we discovered while using the potties. I am not sure if they were pleased that we were looking.

My nanny, Katya, watched over me in the orphanage. She had the undestroyed culture of love. I owe her a lot, especially in regard to my emotional education.

DS: Was the culture of love destroyed in other people?

KM: Many people in the Soviet Union had their culture of love destroyed. This was a result of their demoralizing and traumatic experiences: Stalinist terror, separations, prisons, lagers, executions, etc. Only family could save a person. Katya was someone who hugged me. She might have spanked me a little, but I do not remember. My mother told me that once I told Katya, "Menia bit' nelzia" (You can't spank me).

I was eight when I left Moscow. Katya came to the train station and cried. I told her, "Katia, bud' muzhchinoi!" (Katya, be a man!) Everybody laughed.

DS: What happened to her?

KM: I don't know. She's surely not alive anymore. I feel bad that I did not keep in touch with her. I should have tried harder. I saw her in January 1956 when I went to Moscow with my mother. We slept with my aunt in one of five rooms in a five-family "kolkhoz" apartment. Katya was a cleaner in a hospital. She had taken vacation to be with us. Just like before, she fried potatoes for us and then sliced them. When my mother was still alive, I would sometimes call Katya on the phone, and when I heard her voice pronouncing, "Kiryushenka rodnoi" (Dear Kiryusha) with such a classic Russian intonation, I always wanted to cry.

DS: How did she come to your family?

KM: She came to Moscow from the countryside. She had to leave her place at the beginning of the 1930s because of an unhappy love or because of collectivization. She found a place with my mother’s father as a housekeeper. My grandfather was an engineer, his name was Ilya Wilter, therefore my mother was Natalia Ilyichna, the same as Lenin was Vladimir Ilyich. Ilya was a Jewish name; it was popular in Russia because it was biblical. My grandmother’s name was Nina. She died in 1948 in Russia. My relations with her weren’t strong. The only thing I remember (and it’s interesting that I remember this) is that once in the kitchen she called Stalin “Etot izverg” (that monster). It was a common kitchen shared by five families, and someone could have overheard her. This represented our family’s enmity toward Stalin. My grandfather was a Menshevik. In the 1930s he was sent to a lager. He was released during the war thanks to Zygmunt Modzelewski. But he was already a *dokhodyaga*, a Muselmann.[9]

My grandfather visited me in the orphanage; it happened to be on his way. I remember he took me for a walk. He was a diminutive and shriveled old man with a cane. He tortured me with mathematical puzzles that I did not understand. He was gone in a week. He died sometime during the winter. My mother told me that his coffin was carried to the cemetery on a cart. The horses were used to being urged on with “fuck you!” But when they were pulling a dead man, and the coachman yelled “hey you!” The horses did not want to pull the cart, and they were late with the coffin for the funeral. Why am I telling you all this?

DS: It’s very interesting.

KM: My ancestors on my mother’s side were Jews from Vilna. My great-grandfather was caught with underground publications by the tsarist gendarmerie, and he got the same offer as I did in communist Poland—either to go to the West or to be sent to the East. They left for France. When Małgorzata and I went to Paris, my mother’s paternal uncle’s son Volodya was still alive. Our grandfather, a mining engineer, a graduate of the École des Mines in Paris, returned to Russia with his family. The family stayed there, but Volodya reemigrated to France in the 1920s. When I met him he was 102. Małgorzata and I asked him why the Wilters had returned to Russia—surely not just to get trapped in World War I, the revolution, the civil war, and communism? He answered, “Kak eto? Ved’ Tsar amnistyu obyavil"—the Tsar declared amnesty. That's why they returned to the homeland. Not to Vilna, but to Moscow. Their homeland was Russia. The Jews assimilated to the language of the state and not to an ethnic language of a place.

Katya cooked and cleaned in my grandparents' house. Once she went with my father and mother to Crimea for a vacation; I was not in the plans yet. I was born in 1937. As my mother told me—she had the guts to tell me—I was born only because Stalin had issued a law prohibiting all abortions with severe punishment for both the woman and the doctor. Women were supposed to bear the heroes of socialist labor and war.

DS: There are some who have similar ideas in today's Poland.

KM: Yes. They say that abortion is "Stalinist." But in Stalinist Russia abortions were prohibited, as they were in Stalinist Poland too. Only during the "Thaw" was this relaxed, and abortions became accessible. My birth father, who wanted a child, apparently joked that I was a "dekretniy rebenok," decreed child. I think my mother did not want me. She told me about this because she apparently thought it funny. I did not ask her further about it.

DS: Were your parents married?

KM: I don't know. They got together around 1930. Stalin was already in power, and the screws were being tightened, but social norms were still relaxed. It was enough for a couple to present a document from the registration office that declared they lived together to be regarded as a marriage. Not in one apartment, but in one room. A number of separate families could live in a single apartment.

My parents lived in one room along with my grandmother, grandfather, Uncle Mikołaj, Aunt Lola, and Katya. Then I was born. There were eight of us. It was a large room, with an anteroom partly separated with a screen for Katya, and my uncle and aunt's section behind a curtain. My mother and father must have had some sort of document stating they were married, because my mother visited my father in the lager. He was sent there for eight years. This happened seventeen days after I was born.

DS: What year was your mother, Natalia Modzelewska , born? I have seen several different dates.

KM: 1907, but when her papers were issued again in Poland, she stated she was five years younger. Judging by the letters, the love between her and my father was very passionate. My mother was pretty, with lots of charm, but I have to say it, she had a tough character. All my wives experienced this—with the exception of my current wife, Małgorzata, with whom I have been together since 1994. My mother died in 1992. I had my own issues with my mother; she could manipulate peoples' feelings. My birth father, Alexandr Budnyevich, must have had the patience of an angel to cope with this. She was possessive and despotic. She could stand my girlfriends quite well, but not my wives. This was understandable—some strange woman was trying to own her boy, which was unacceptable. However, I resisted, or rather, escaped from her.

DS: Including to prison?

KM: You're trying to get me to spill the beans. Some people in my family thought that I went to prison because I did not want to cope with my family. That I was running away. This was a kind of joke, but maybe not entirely. I escaped from my mother into my second marriage. In 1971 I went to live with my mother straight from prison. I talked to my then-wife, and then I took my suitcase from her place and carried it one flight down—we all lived in the same building at the corner of Marszałkowska and Świętokrzyska streets. Two years later I fell in love and definitively left my mother's apartment.

DS: What kind of women did you like?

KM: Women with good taste, who dress with discreet elegance, and are intelligent and decisive. A revolutionary type. For me it's not just about good looks, because many women are pretty, but about style as well. My current wife has all of this.

I'd rather not discuss my previous women. Although I have to say my first wife was very brave. We met at the university. When I landed in prison in 1964, she went to Prosecutor Kazimierz Kukawka at the General Prosecutor's Office and asked, "Where's my husband?"

My second wife was also tough. We met in 1973, when as an employee of the Archeology Division for the Odra Basin at the Institute of History and Material Culture, I went to a dig in Sobótka near Wrocław. Ola was there, an OBGYN nurse with the soul of an archeologist. Initially she was coming to sketch the outlines of the digs, but when it turned out that our group had nothing to eat, she took a vacation from her clinic and cooked for us. She had a large white dog, similar to a Polish Tatra Sheepdog, and I have a soft spot for dogs. I love dogs. Once during dinner I told her it was too much food for me. She replied, “Don’t fuss, just eat.” Her dog came and licked my face. I smiled broadly with pleasure—and this was how it got started. The dog’s name was Ami, but I renamed him Radziwiłł because he looked like Władysław Hańcza playing Prince Janusz Radziwiłł in the movie *The Deluge*. The dog had a princely dignity. He was spoiled, clever, and had a great personality.

DS: What about your wife?

KM: We got married a year later. I always chose difficult women. They were all somewhat like my mother. I still needed to mature into a healthy partnership.

DS: So it did not work earlier?

KM: I tried very hard, I really did.

I met my current wife, Małgorzata, during the strike in Jelenia Góra in January 1981. She was a journalist with the Wrocław Radio, and she wanted to report from the strike in which the Solidarity activists were demanding that the Minister for Trade Unions Stanisław Ciosek, a perfectly decent person, be fired from his post. They also wanted to transfer a sanatorium that belonged to the Ministry of Internal Affairs as well as a Central Committee’s vacation retreat to the Jelenia Góra public health service. As Solidarity’s spokesman and a member of the Wrocław regional Solidarity presidium I went there with Lech Wałęsa to talk them out of the strike. I saw Małgorzata, but it was only a casual meeting. We met for the second time in 1989 at a rally, and when I became a senator, she held weekly radio interviews with me. They were aired until 1994 when we got married. I have been well taken care of ever since. When my son reappeared in my life, she accepted it.

DS: Doesn’t your story with your son seem a bit like your own?

KM: To me the story with my son is more complicated.

My mother pulled something with my birth father by taking off to Poland just as he was leaving the camps. She did not tell him ahead of time. Apparently she was afraid that his release would shake her resolve. She packed us up and we got on the train. She had visited him several times telling him that everything was fine.

DS: He didn't know that Zygmunt Modzelewski was living with her, did he?

KM: I don't think so. He expected that after his release he would find his wife and his eight-year-old son at home. It did not work out this way.

DS: How did he deal with it?

KM: I saw him only twice afterward. First when my mother took me to Moscow in 1947. At that time I was more vulnerable than he was. I was under ten, and I was taken to my cousins on my father's side. These people were completely strange to me. They presented me with a man in a faded military coat, saying, "Here is your father. Now you need to decide if you want to live with him in Russia, or with your mother in Warsaw." I got scared. I don't remember much more from that meeting.

When my mother and I went to Moscow in 1956, I talked to my birth father. I had just turned nineteen. I did not realize what could have happened to me in the Soviet Union, and I don't think my mother realized it either. They could have essentially told me, "You claim you're Modzelewski? That's bullshit. You're really Kirill Budnyevich, and you belong with us. You shouldn't be among strangers, so we won't let you out." Later I was terribly scared and did not dare go there for over thirty years. Only in 1989 did I go with a diplomatic passport, and then I saw that no one was scared any more. Fear was dead. I realized that the Soviet Union was about to collapse.

DS: Did you feel a sense of loss because your father wasn't with you?

KM: No. When I was little, I knew that my father wasn't around because of the war. Later I did not ask. Perhaps I thought it was taboo. I did not consider him my father. If I ever had a father, he was Zygmunt Modzelewski.

DS: Did you have a good relationship with Modzelewski?

KM: There was a distance between us. I respected him, and he tried to instill his value system on me. But he never lectured me or pressed anything upon me. I could tell him anything, but I was afraid of appearing stupid. I was emotionally connected to my mother, while he was to me an intellectual authority. His life was a fragment of Polish history, but a good history. My parents are laid to rest in one grave in the Alley of the

Distinguished in the Powązki Cemetery.[10] If they kick him out of there, they will be kicking out my non-Party mother too.

DS: Yes, there have been attempts at the so-called decommunization of Powązki.

KM: It would be the simplest to put me in the same grave. No extra costs for putting me into the ground. Danuta Kuroń joked that they should bury me next to Jacek. But today I should hardly count on any posthumous acknowledgment of my merits.

DS: My advice—just weather this regime.

KM: I am not in a rush to die, but I have some reasons to think about this.

DS: Do you look like your father?

KM: My mother saw some resemblance. Sometimes she called me "Shurka's son." Shura, or Shurka, is a diminutive of Alexandr. Perhaps my eyes are similar. My father looks very handsome in photographs; but when I met him, he was already worn out.

He spent a part of his time in the lagers in the so-called *sharaska*, or prison research institute, similar to the one described by Solzhenitsyn in *The First Circle*. He had nearly completed his engineer's training, so they took him on as auxiliary personnel, which helped him survive. He also worked felling trees. This was in a regular lager. Every day at roll call a list of those executed that day was read out—for failing to meet the work quota, for playing cards, for intercourse with a woman, etc. "So and so was sentenced with the ultimate penalty; the sentence was carried out." He told me this in January 1956, before the Twentieth CPSU Congress. It was horrible to hear, even if I had already known a little bit about Stalinism. My mother had told me some—as a daughter of a Menshevik martyred in the camps, she truly hated Stalin. She told Czesław Miłosz, with whom she once had been romantically involved, that if he ever chose to stay in the West, he should never forget.

DS: . . . to fight against the oppressor of Russia?

KM: Yes. She felt it in a very Russian way, as a matter of fact.

DS: It was owing to her that Czesław Miłosz was given back his passport and left for France in 1951, wasn't it?

KM: My mother had her own hypothesis about this, and I like it. She thought that my father, that is, Zygmunt Modzelewski, had noticed their mutual attraction and decided that it would be better if Miłosz left.

DS: There was a rumor that they had an affair . . .

KM: Consider that at that time my father was only nominally the Minister of Foreign Affairs; in fact, he had not been working since his second heart attack in 1949. For him to obtain permission for Miłosz to leave Poland, he probably would have had to go all the way to Bierut himself and argue that even if Miłosz wouldn't ever return, it would be better to let him go. He argued that if we wouldn't let him out, we would turn him into an enemy. It was elaborate, but it worked.

DS: This saved Miłosz's life.

KM: His life and output would certainly have been different.

DS: He visited your home. Do you remember his visits?

KM: I do. When we moved to Poland, I was sent straight into the fourth grade because my Polish was good. I knew when to write "ó," when to put "u," when to put "rz," and when to put "ż"—this was easy because of the spelling of the same words in Russian. But I stank at math.

Once I was crying over math as usual, and my mother told me I had to go to school, and she wouldn't write an excuse that I was sick because this would be a lie. Miłosz, who was visiting us, intervened. He told me a made-up story about a boy who couldn't solve his math problems and was in despair, and he suddenly saw a furry monkey sitting on a tree outside the window. He opened the window, and the monkey caught him and carried him far away. I loved this story. Eventually he told my mother, "Natalia, what do you care. Just write him the note. He's never going to be a mathematician anyway, he will become something different." So she wrote the note.

DS: Your mother was an important figure in Polish literature.

KM: She was important because she beautifully translated works by Mikhail Bakhtin into Polish. She also translated *The Doll* by Bolesław Prus to Russian. She was the editor for eleven volumes of Chekhov's works in Polish, and she managed to enlist the best Polish writers to translate them, including Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, Maria Dąbrowska, Aleksander Wat, and Jerzy Pomianowski, as well as Irena Bajkowska, an editor from the Czytelnik publishing house.

DS: It seems you don't particularly like Iwaszkiewicz.

KM: I try to be politically correct. When I was a child, I asked my parents difficult questions at the dinner table—I figured they wouldn't ignore me then. Andrzej Krzywicki, Irena Krzywicka's son, was my school friend. Once I was visiting them, and Andrzej's mother blurted out, "That faggot Iwaszkiewicz . . ." I perked up my ears, and later at home I asked at the dinner table, "Is it true that Mr. Iwaszkiewicz is a faggot?" My father coughed, and then a silence fell. Finally he said, "First of all, you don't say faggot, you say homosexual. Besides (here he was lying), I do not know if he is a homosexual or not, and perhaps we shouldn't dig into his affairs—this is his private business." This was not the result of my father's upbringing in his hometown of Częstochowa, or from the Polish-Bolshevik war, or the communist underground, but from his education in the salons of left-wing French intellectuals in the 1920s and 1930s when he was living in France. This was my first lesson in political correctness that I received at home. I did not fully absorb it. Oh well.

DS: What do you mean, oh well?

KM: Unfortunately sometimes I am completely oblivious about words. For instance, I can see myself saying "faggot."

DS: I asked about your dislike of Iwaszkiewicz because of how he characterized you in his diary—that you don't have a drop of Polish blood.

KM: Ha-ha, that may well be true, but why does it matter? Someone whose name is Iwaszkiewicz should think about his own origins too. It is not an ethnically Polish surname. It is Belorussian, a patronym of Ivashko, right? Why was he acting like a hematologist drawing conclusions about anyone's national identities?

He wrote this out of ignorance in order to call out KOR, even if I was not a KOR member. He named me as an example of someone who was ethnically alien—a Russian and a Jew, and a vagabond to boot. But apparently he liked my mother. Iwaszkiewicz was a very good writer, but a mediocre person. He liked to ingratiate himself with the authorities, and it was easiest to express this aspiration through the words written in his diary. That time it happened to be about KOR. I was not in KOR, but everybody thought I was because I had been jailed with Kuroń for the "Open Letter," as well as for March 1968.

DS: How did your mother influence your literary taste?

KM: She was fascinated with Chekhov. Our home was full of his books. I was hurt by this because I could not appreciate Chekhov for a long time. Moreover, my mother was working with his plays that seem dated to me, belonging to the nineteenth century, whereas his prose is absolutely modern.

DS: But the world's eternal hopelessness is found in his plays too. That fellow in *The Cherry Orchard* walks around with a pistol because he does not know if he wants to live or not, and nobody knows when he might take a fancy to shoot himself in the head. This is as funny as it is universal.

KM: My mother thought that she found the key to his plays—irony. Though they are presented as heavy-duty dramas, they actually are not. She was probably right.

DS: What about his short stories? Which ones do you like?

KM: *Ward No. 6*. Grim stuff, isn't it?

DS: A doctor finds a common language with his mentally ill patient and is regarded as mentally ill himself. It's the essence of life.

KM: You see our lives very dramatically—well, it is mostly really like this. I prefer *Gusev* over *Ward No. 6*. A military man, furloughed indefinitely, returns to Russia on a ship. He's on the way home from the Far East because he's ill with tuberculosis. He dies on his way and is dumped into the sea.

For me, two Caucasian texts by Tolstoy are more important than Chekhov. The story *Haji Murat* is a must-read for today. It's about the Caucasus and a Muslim leader who on the surface makes a deal with Russia. The second one is his novel *The Cossacks*, which is about the truth about war as seen by rank-and-file Russian soldiers. Why are we talking so much about Russia?

DS: Then let's go back to Poland. Tell me, did your mother have an affair with Miłosz?

KM: There was certainly some fascination between them, on both sides. It seems that Miłosz was a womanizer, and my mother made a strong impression on men. On Jerzy Pomianowski as well.[11] He visited us when we were still in Moscow and would devour her with his eyes. Once I benefited from this—he let me play with his pistol, which my father would never allowed. My father had a pistol. He was an officer with the First Division of the Polish People's Army, and he wore a uniform every day. When I asked him to let me play with the holster, he refused. "A pistol, even unloaded, shoots once a year by itself," he explained. I would ask him if it already had been shot for that year—I was a clever child. He responded, "Not yet," and that's why I couldn't touch it.

But one day Pomianowski came to visit us, and he had a holster. I said to him, "Uncle, can I play with it?" He drew the pistol, took out the magazine, looked into the barrel, and handed it to me. I asked, "Uncle, how many Germans did you kill with it?" He did not blink, but told me, "ten." I hid my disappointment that it was only ten and kept pressing him. "Tell me about it!" He made something up, "They were running toward us, and I was defending our trench. I stood on top and shot them. You know, there are eight bullets in the magazine, and the ninth is in the barrel. I killed nine Germans with these. When the tenth one ran up to me, I grabbed the pistol by its barrel, and hit him on the head with the handle."

Even as an impressionable boy, my uncle disappointed me. When you lie to a child, you need do it with a flair. I loved to draw war scenes, so I drew my own version of what happened—Pomianowski shoots at the Germans running toward him, and German corpses pile up at his feet. Since by that time I knew Polish, the caption read in Polish, "Mr. Jerzy at Grunwald."[12] He kept that picture, and many years later he showed it to me. He joked that he had some evidence against me.

DS: What does it mean that you were an impressionable boy?

KM: Once, when I was ten, we had some visitors, and the conversation turned to death. I started to cry. When they asked me why I was crying, I said, "Because I would like to keep living a little longer." The adults asked, "How long would you like to live?" I answered through my tears, "At least seventy years." I can hear their Homeric laughter until this day. It really hurt me. I only thought of this recently.

DS: What would you answer today?

KM: At my age, one has already started to think about death. Everybody must die at some point. It's better that it not be cancer, because that would be painful. If it is to be a stroke, it would be better not to be totally incapacitated. I have seen such people in the hospital, and I don't want to experience this. Situations in which I would be executed or something like that are luckily pretty much behind me.

DS: Have you been in such situations?

KM: I was never aware that I was. Once the Soviet comrades and our comrades discussed how to get rid of Solidarity—by executing several thousand people—I'm sure I would have been among them.

DS: When have you been the closest to death?

KM: Maybe a few times in the mountains, I don't know.

DS: You are a mountain climber. And you even played a climber in the movie *The Blue Cross* by Andrzej Munk , although you're not listed in the credits.

KM: This was in 1955, when I was a skier but not yet a climber. Munk was making a movie about a historical wartime event, the evacuation of a partisan hospital near the Rohacze Mountains by the Mountain Rescue during World War II. We shot it on Świnica Pass.

Munk knew my mother, and when he overheard me speaking fluent Russian, he looked at me and said I could play as an extra, as a Soviet soldier. They gave me a helmet with a red star, a green *fufaika*, *fufaika* pants, and *valenki*. They boots were difficult to walk in, but luckily I they gave me a Mosin rifle that I used as an ice axe. Munk gave me the movie role because I could speak the language, but none of my dialogue was left in the film—just two small wordless clips. In one, Stanisław Gąsienica-Byrcyn and I drank vodka from a canteen. The production manager was a cheapskate and diluted the vodka with water. This made us screw up our faces, which looked good on the screen. In the other clip was when we watched the Back Silent Valley in Slovakia through binoculars, and I fired a shot in that direction.

Nearly all the roles were played by amateurs. I think only Wojciech Siemion was a professional actor. He played a partisan who had his leg amputated with a knife and a saw. He asked Munk what he should do during the amputation. Munk said, "Don't do anything special, just lie still," and when the camera started to roll, he took a very large safety pin, and stuck it into Siemion's ass. Yet not a single muscle moved on his face.

DS: When did you start getting into the mountains?

KM: When I was a teenager, I got really fat, and my parents sent me to the mountains to lose weight. I had started to stuff myself with food after I moved to Poland. I don't know whether my eating was a psychological issue or because there was so much good food available. As a result, during my pubescent years I swam a lot and hiked in the Tatra Mountains. I sought out more and more challenges when I discovered that when you have nothing but the wind blowing between your legs, this stirs up lots of emotions, which feels great, doesn't it? So the only time I would take the Eagles' Path, a fairly easy route, would be in the winter when the path was under snow and ice. I enrolled in a climbing class at the age of eighteen or nineteen. I had a crush, not entirely platonic, on Maria Skoczyńska, who was ten years older and who had been climbing with famous climbers such as Dr. Tadeusz Orłowski, who later designed the artificial kidney. I enrolled in this class because of her, and then I made the most difficult climb of my entire life—the Left Wrześniaks' route on the south face of Zamarła Turnia.

DS: Aren't you afraid of heights?

KM: No. Fear comes when something goes wrong, for instance when you are about to fall, and you on the verge of letting go. You get the so-called sewing machine legs, when your feet begin to shake from the fatigue of your calf muscles. This happened to me on Zamarła Turnia, and I was scared.

DS: Was this when you were the closest to death?

KM: No, I will tell you when that happened. One time the actor Stanisław Brejdygant boasted to me that he had done some extremely difficult climbs, worse than Zamarła Turnia. So I proposed that we do Mięguszowiecki Ridge together. We hiked to the pass under Chłopek Peak and traversed over to the Middle Mięguszowiecki Peak. From there we needed to descend by two rappels down to the Upper Mięguszowiecki Pass. When I noticed he was quaking in his boots, I was thrilled—I had to take this prick climbing on this particular route. I fixed the belay for him, lowered him on the rope, and then rappelled the route without a belay. I then fixed a second belay, lowered him, and rappelled again. The rappels were very exposed on both sides. It turned out he was afraid of heights, and he completely freaked out. But we had only just started climbing this moderately difficult route—for me, this was like someone had snatched a treat from under my nose.

DS: Are you such a daredevil?

KM: Such is the masculine nature. I have to be a "real man." Luckily Brejdygant didn't let me talk him into continuing, and we descended an easier southern route through Slovakia. Hiking until dark, we found ourselves on an unfamiliar terrain. We dragged ourselves along the Hińczowa Valley floor without seeing where we were going. Ultimately we walked out with the help of some Polish smugglers.

DS: Have you ever freaked out yourself?

KM: No, but I was close to it when my wife and I climbed to the ridge of Miedziany Peak near Morskie Oko. It was more of a scramble than a climbing route, but it was icy and under snow. Ropes were essential, and there was a risk of falling. My wife was a complete novice at the time, and it became very late. I was enchanted by the immense red moon lighting up the mountains, but my wife started crying in fear when she realized how long a descent we had. Guidebooks always note that if someone becomes hysterical, you should slap the person in the face—but how can you slap your wife? I didn't do it. Some animal was howling in the darkness, and I was afraid that we would be forced to camp overnight without equipment. Even today I get goosebumps thinking about how stupid I was during that climb.

DS: Why did you need to do all that climbing?

KM: If I knew why I needed to climb, I wouldn't climb. It is irrational, it's a drug. Adrenaline. Testing oneself. Playing with death is exciting—as long as it is not serious. When it is serious, it's no longer fun.

DS: The breath of death—what is it like?

KM: Hot. As if a large animal was breathing on you. But then, when you're home, you're drawn to the mountains again. I think people with a special psychological makeup are attracted to it. They have to test their courage.

DS: Are you one of these?

KM: Apparently. Finding this out would require a thorough self-examination, though. I'm not sure I could do it.

DS: Was your involvement in politics a result of the same need?

KM: It is different, but there is also a kind of adrenaline in it. Jacek Kuroń ran on this adrenaline his entire life.

DS: If you provoked death like this, was there ever a time you wanted to die?

KM: Everybody has such moments when he doesn't know how to deal with something. But for me it never happened in prison. Biological life has no meaning because the essence of meaning is in purposefulness. Life as such is an end for itself, and it does not need meaning. Life makes sense when one has a purpose. But life itself has no sense. Just like all other beings, man is biologically designed to want to live.

DS: What was most difficult thing for you, if not prison?

KM: Life itself. Personal crises. A man develops armor in prison. He has to. If something trips him up—luckily this did not happen to me—then things can turn bad.

DS: What do you mean by something tripping him up?

KM: When a man shows up as being weak during a time of trial. I saw this happening to others.

DS: How do you get the armor?

KM: God, you're drilling me. . . . You have to be anesthetized to certain situations, in a sense against yourself. You need to lower the threshold of your psychological sensitivity. Polish prisons, the ones I know, were not comparable to the Stalinist ones. But nevertheless it's a brutal world with many features of cruelty that are contained in both the system itself and in the prisoners' reactions to the system.

DS: Does this mean that your personal life was more difficult for you than fixing the world?

KM: Political struggle is simpler. Not everything is black or white, but you can make it this way.

DS: Have you ever been happy?

KM: A few times. For instance, when I was sentenced to three and a half years in 1969.

DS: Why were you happy about that?

KM: I expected something much worse. And my trial, thanks to the judges, was carried out without bringing up all the shit, if you pardon my language.

DS: What shit?

KM: The huge propaganda machine that the SB and the prosecutors tried to develop was disarmed—that we were supposedly the agents of foreign powers. The charge of Trotskyism, which had been used in my first trial, was about to be rehashed.

DS: A true revolutionary has to serve time in prison, doesn't he?

KM: The tradition of every revolutionary includes the romantic myth of prison. It ennobles one. Jacek felt this too. He said he was deeply moved when he was handcuffed for the first time on the way to his trial in 1965. He would always say that handcuffs were his only jewelry. He had a point.

DS: You also wore the same jewelry.

KM: I was handcuffed in the court building in a basement cell that was called a "chaff cutter." We were led through a corridor, and I spotted a group of young people who later became the "Paratroopers." I greeted them by shaking my handcuffs. It was a reflex, but I was very pleased with myself. Jacek saw it and did the same.

Our lawyer Aniela Steinsbergowa was very upset, and lamented to me in the courtroom, "They shackled you . . ." The judges were impassive; I cannot say a single good thing about them. The court was presided by Judge Aleksy Żylewicz. Steinsbergowa raised her hand, "I submit a motion to remove the handcuffs. I have never seen political prisoners led to the courtroom in handcuffs. When I was a defender in the communist trials . . ." Here she corrected herself, "The trials before the war, that is, as a young lawyer . . ." And they removed them. I am boring you with so many details . . .

DS: It's just a drop in the bucket.

KM: I was showing off a little, with these handcuffs, don't you think? I can tell you a couple anecdotes about the militiamen who were my fans. I loved them.

During my first trial, two officers escorted me. One was slender and the other fat. Like Pat and Patachon.[13] It was July and it was hot. I was driven from Mokotów prison in a van, a so-called bitch. Inside are two benches for prisoners next to the wall, and two tiny isolation compartments near the door. Each of these has a little wooden bench. You sit on it with your knees against the metal of the door, your elbows are against the metal at your back. There are five small holes in the door so you won't suffocate. When I sat in it, I became completely soaked with sweat.

The next day as I went into the cage, the slender officer felt sorry for me and said, "You know what, I will keep the door open." He guarded me by sitting in front of me with his legs dangling above the street, while I held him by his belt so that he wouldn't fall out. When I was sentenced, he nodded his head, "You see, Mr. Karol, one must suffer for the truth. It's always been this way." I was very fond of him.

DS: What about the other one?

KM: On New Year's Eve 1966 I was taken from the Barczewo prison to the police station in Olsztyn and locked up with a fellow who had attempted suicide. He was despondent, and when he had sobered up, he asked me if suicide was punishable. I asked the warden to knock on the door of our cell at midnight so that we could at least smoke a New Year's cigarette. In response, I hear the key turning in the lock. A guy enters in a tie and with shoelaces—which meant he had not been arrested. He asks, "Which one is Modzelewski?" I say, "I am." "Where were you living in August 1945?" "In Moscow." "What street?" "Tolstoy Street." "In the Polish embassy?" I confirm it. "Don't you recognize me? I'm Henryk Witkowski," and he gives me a high-five. Then he shouts to the warden in the corridor, "Poldek, make some coffee, I met a friend."

His mother had worked for the embassy. He was fatherless. I spent that New Year with him outside the cell and drinking some decent coffee. The next day he brought me some pork loin and two oranges from his mother—things it was impossible to get in prison. He shuffled his feet uneasily, "Because you know, my father was killed in Katyń." This was pure Polishness.

Sometimes a conversation from prison pops into my mind, and memories start to flow. Providing that there is ever anything to remember from prison, because for the most part, time is transparent there.

DS: What do you mean by transparent?

KM: I mean that nothing happens there.

DS: Did you have any moments of panic or hysteria?

KM: No, never any hysteria. I cried only once in prison—nobody saw me—when I read in a letter that my dog Radziwiłł was gone. My then wife, the one from Sobótka, had visited me earlier and she was sad. But she did not tell me that anything was wrong, and I always asked about our dog. She wrote me about it only later in a letter.

DS: Apparently in Białołęka you got into a fight with someone, didn't you?

KM: I don't want to admit to it because I'm embarrassed.

DS: This is rather funny considering everything you had gone through.

KM: It is funny. It was between Seweryn Jaworski and me. We were the only ones in the cell.

DS: Was it at least for some just cause?

KM: He had just cause. In God's name.

DS: Did he have a grudge against you because of your obstinacy about God?

KM: He liked my obstinacy. Once, an inspection officer demanded that I remove my Solidarity button. He barked, "Do I make myself clear?" "Yes." "Surrender it to me." "No." And I did not. Seweryn looked at me and told me he was proud of me. No, we didn't fight about obstinacy. I let him be proud of me.

DS: Then what was it about?

KM: I won't say exactly, but he had offered to baptize me. With water. I put a condition on it—if I were to be baptized, it had to be performed by the Holy See himself, and Wałęsa and Anna Walentynowicz were to carry me in dressed in the christening gown.

DS: Quite an image!

KM: Among the Solidarity activists there was much ribald, folksy anticlericalism. There was even more of it than there was of atheism. It was the same for the radical workers' activists. Because the Church, as its hierarchy always did, tried to mitigate this spontaneous, anarchistic movement. The Church people tried to placate us, which infuriated us. People said, "These padres boss us around like this is their union."

DS: You never hid that you're agnostic.

KM: I grew up without religion, and this cannot be redeemed in adulthood. But for me the Gospels are an absolutely incredible text. I have read them in many different ways. When I read them in Latin, they are history for me. I am looking for the phraseological vocabulary and the body of ideas that were used by medieval authors. But if I read the Bible in Polish (I like Father Wujek's translation, his baroque Polish is beautiful), it is as if someone is speaking to me today. I know it comes from a different epoch, and there is an abyss of civilizations between them, but this is the text for me. The words of Christ are completely understandable to me. They are amazing.

DS: Well, Jesus was the most honest left-wing activist in the world. A leftie, as they say.

KM: He was no leftie. He was a revolutionary and utopist. A moral revolutionary. The term “leftie” is anachronistic. I hate it. When I hear “leftie,” I immediately think, “rightie” or “rightyism”—which sounds like “parasitism.” It is a label that expresses nothing except the intention to slander.

DS: What in the Gospels is the most appealing to you?

KM: There are many parts that I like; some even are leftist. But for me the most enchanting one is the story of the adulteress. If you read it carefully, it is very wise, and axiologically sound. I mean in the way that relations between people are evaluated.

DS: “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her”?

KM: It’s as if there are no cultural differences that divide me from that time and that fellow who said what he said. Forgive me for speaking of Jesus like this, without proper respect—but I really respect him.

DS: Is it that history changes, but man does not at all?

KM: That’s not true. Man does change. But this does not change. That’s why the Gospels are fascinating to me. I don’t feel superior and say that it’s all bullshit, and God doesn’t exist at all. If He appeals to me across two thousand years, that means He exists.

DS: Doesn’t it surprise you to say this?

KM: An easier question, please.

DS: Sure. What will happen to the world?

KM: I deal in history, and not hencity. I am borrowing the term hencity from Stanisław Lem.[14] He said that futurologists deal in the hencity. He was very witty and intelligent. In a sense, he was a genius.

DS: Does this mean that you also read science fiction?

KM: No, only Lem. He writes stinging satire disguised as science fiction. Exquisite.

DS: Are you trying to avoid my question with your comment about Lem ?

KM: No, I think there's no answer.

DS: But you have some premonitions and fears, don't you?

KM: I can't say, "Ia se ne boim, ia mam rakovinu" like in that Czech joke when at a party meeting a citizen is informed that the development of communism in Czechoslovakia is about to be completed, and he responds, "I'm not scared, I have cancer." I cannot say this because I have a family. I have two granddaughters and a small grandson.

DS: What scares you?

KM: My dear, our entire future looks rather scary.

DS: War?

KM: Possibly. The world order is about to collapse—the one that has been secured by the United States and the European Union. The Union was indeed a utopian idea. It was born in 1941 among the Italian antifascists interned on Ventotene Island. They thought that in order to end wars, Europe needed to be integrated. Then many politicians, mostly of the liberal-democratic or Social-Democratic bent, started to figure out what needed to be done in order to integrate nation-states so that none feel captive. First of all it had to be voluntary in the economic aspect—hence the crazy idea to introduce a common currency and banking system without fiscal integration and other political instruments. This has worked for a while. We have been without a major war in Europe since 1945.

But now, when social tensions are surfacing, the principle of unanimity starts to reveal its destructive potential. There must be some attempts to rein in the global capital, this total savagery, by political structures. Here I am touching upon hencity, contrary to my own principles. If some kind of alliance of the states won't do it, that is, something like the European Union, then the superpowers can try. And the struggle for the hegemony will ensue between them. Yet the military means of the struggle for hegemony is still in the hands of nation-states. I do not want to prophesize who will fight against whom, but the possibility of war is built into the deregulation of the world.

DS: As a historian, what do you think is humanity's purpose?

KM: Humanity has no purpose. Well, perhaps it has some purpose, but we know nothing about it, therefore we are not able to proceed according to a plan. We may act rationally, but different things occur that we do not intend. This is the only basic lesson we can learn from the history of the world. Many ideas, plans, and ideologies fall apart in an instant. It is a mill in which we are all turning the grind stone, but most of us do it aimlessly. And if some do it with an aim in view, then they are surprised at the results.

DS: Does it mean you don't believe in historical necessity?

KM: No. Historical necessity reinforces the spirit of weak people, because it determines that someday they will win. They need to believe they are going to win in order not to lose their spirit. And they are sure of it when they talk themselves into believing that such is historical necessity.

DS: But despite wars, aren't we moving toward something better?

KM: I have no idea what we are moving toward. Once I thought I knew, but I was mistaken. I mean in my younger years.

DS: Did you think we were on our way to a beautiful commune where everybody would be happy?

KM: To democratic socialism. To a workers' state. That's what I thought.

DS: Why should the workers in particular have been privileged?

KM: There are fewer and fewer workers. Class still seems to exist, but not the working class. The working class has played an enormous historical role, though not the one it wanted to play, and surely not the one Marx and other inspired leaders intended for it. I do not count Solidarity because for me Solidarity was not a utopia, but a praxis. I have said many times that Solidarity was a revolution.

DS: What about now—do we have a revolution now?

KM: Culottes are not enough—that is, breeches, or long johns in French. Breeches are not enough to become a revolutionary.

DS: The people are going to the barricades together with Kaczyński .

KM: As long as we do not find a common language with that other part of Poland, we won't find a way out from that dead-end street where we are because of PiS and ourselves. A communication barrier separates the elites, or a large part of the intelligentsia, from the working class that was declassed two or three generations earlier. It's like in my 1970s apartment building that was built for the military and militiamen, as well as for people from the demolitions, that is, the Warsaw lumpenproletariat. Many people who were laid off from Huta Warszawa, or their children and grandchildren, live here. This is a devoted PiS electorate, that is, half of them, because the other half doesn't vote at all.

DS: Didn't you used to idealize them?

KM: I did, until I got to know them. And when I got to know them, I came to like them.

DS: Even if they vote the way they do?

KM: So what?

DS: Our country is falling apart.

KM: Believe it or not, they have good reason to vote the way they do. We have treated them like the manure of history. Like those who must be cast off of the transformation and modernization boat. Because of their uselessness to us as part of that modernization. Why should they love us? What for? Why should they love democracy, if in their minds it is associated with harm done to them? Very shortly after 1989, Senator Zbigniew Rokicki of the Solidarity of Individual Farmers declared in the Senate that social justice is a vestige of socialism. I made a note of this. This is why I do not protest when I am called a socialist.

DS: What was Marxism's contribution to the world? Is there anything good left from it?

KM: It is not that something is just good or bad. Bolshevism gave the world great literature, Isaac Babel for instance. The Stalinist disaster gave us Solzhenitsyn, etc. What has Marxism given us—we will know in a while, because this subject still is burdened with trauma. But Marxism cannot completely disappear from memory because it is an important link in the history of humanity. Marx's motives were noble. Many different people will reach for his legacy, but there will be no simple repetition. Too much has changed in the world and in the structures of human thinking.

DS: Which of your ideals have not become outdated?

KM: Marxism interests me more as a method to interpret history and social reality than as utopia. As a utopia Marxism is an eschatology, that is, nothing new. It is simply God's kingdom on earth, except without God. In order to criticize the baseness of contemporary reality, one needs to juxtapose it with an ideal world that will come in the future. Without a vision of God's kingdom on earth, there can be no appropriately radical criticism of the present world. Marxist thinking just puts this in lay terms.

But yes, I still believe in freedom, equality, and brotherhood. However, these are the slogans of the French Revolution, and not of the proletarian one. The former was a composite of different peoples in which city plebs played a big role—there were not many workers in Paris factories at that time.

Speaking of Paris, people no longer walk the streets as if it was the cultural navel of the world. This was what I thought when I went to Paris for the first time: there's the café where Sartre wrote and held court, and where my beloved Juliette Gréco sang . . . I knew all the songs she sang there by heart.

DS: You are emotionally tied to Paris, aren't you?

KM: Because of Aniouta?

DS: No, I was thinking more about your family.

KM: Not really. I discovered my family history only recently because my wife who, as a journalist, knows how to listen and to get people to tell their stories. She asked my mother's cousin how my family came to France. Luckily that part of the family had lived in France through World War II and Stalinism.

DS: Who's Aniouta ?

KM: My first love—Aniouta Pitoëff. Her mother and father were well-known French actors of Russian-Armenian origins. The famous French film actor Sacha Pitoëff was Aniouta's brother. Her father died in occupied France, and her mother took Aniouta to the United States and dragged her though all the Broadway theaters. They played Chekhov. Aniouta was a child of the artistic bohème, and I was completely taken with her. I met her when I was twenty and she was twenty-nine. I fell in love. The story was that I had gone to Paris. My mother had given me a camera; it was pretty basic, but at that time you could get 25,000 francs for it. It wasn't much, but I got a room in the Polish embassy in Paris that I shared with another student, and somehow got by. My mother met Aniouta first while researching the reception of Chekhov's plays in Europe. She gave me her address, and when I saw her—I was done for . . . I owe my French to her. She made me learn it.

DS: You have had quite a few loves in your life. Was this one great?

KM: It was. I was smitten. But a revolution stood in our way. It was September or the beginning of October 1957. Between the third and the fifth of October in Warsaw there were rallies because of the closing of the *Po Prostu* weekly. When I read about this in *Le Monde*, I changed my train ticket, kissed her, and went to the barricades with a broken heart. But by the time I arrived in Warsaw, the tear gas had already evaporated.

DS: Were you sorry about that, because you lost your girlfriend?

KM: I was. If I hadn't been sorry, it would mean it didn't have real value for me. That is, the revolution would have had no value. But the revolution went to the dogs. So did my love after a while. Even if she later visited me with her daughter—she had a child. She's no longer alive, alas. She had a taste for crazy guys.

DS: Were you a crazy guy?

KM: Maybe a little. But for her I was just a kid. Some women are like this.

DS: Why did you always choose a "cause" over your personal life?

KM: Sometimes I did choose my own life. For instance, during the KOR period, I chose my professional life. Thanks to luck. When Michnik and Kuroń came to me in 1975 to ask me to sign the letter protesting the changes in the Constitution, they went about advocating for it from the wrong end, which turned me off. They said they had an idea how to go public—that the authorities had opened the national discussion over the constitution, and "this is a good time to kick the shit out of them." So I asked them, "Why would you want to kick the shit out of them? What for? Would it help anything?"

DS: You didn't believe anymore?

KM: This was after 1968 and Czechoslovakia, and I had become moderate. At that time I thought that Gierek's rule was the best we could get. Only when I read in that letter an excerpt written by Jan Olszewski on freedom for trade unions, did I feel . . .

DS: The call of the wild?

KM: Yes. That it really was my cause. But it was already too late.

DS: Were you sorry?

KM: Frankly, I felt stupid, but I had no regrets. My absence from public life during the 1970s—since my release from prison in 1971—allowed me to mature as a historian. I waded through that decade until 1980 more or less left in peace, building up my academic credentials.

One more KOR member more or less wouldn't have made a difference, whereas one less genuine historian—and I think I am a genuine historian—might be a loss. It has turned out for the better.

If not for that time, I would not be a historian today. I was never a professional revolutionary, as Bolsheviks or communists used to say about themselves. But I had not the slightest doubt that I had to be in Solidarity. My greatest political achievement was September 17, 1980, the creation of a single union and its name, and my impact on that union as its spokesman, and later, somewhat less, as a KK member.

DS: Many years ago you said there was no end to history, and there was no end to nations in sight, quite to the contrary.

KM: I'd prefer this prophecy to be less self-fulfilling. Nations will be around for some time, longer than your or my lifespan, and your children's as well. Nationalism is an old reaction to frustration with the problems of the world.

DS: Is what we went through in 1968 returning? The burning of an effigy of a Jew seems to be opening a new chapter.

KM: What we went through in the 1920s and 1930s is returning—with the difference that there are no longer any ethnic minorities in Poland. We can import them, but we don't want to. In order to burn a Jew, his effigy is needed.

DS: What does "a Jew" mean today?

KM: There are many people among my friends who come from Jewish families. They are Poles, but they have preserved some sense of their stigmatization. Is it a complaint or not—I don't really know. Of course it is related to the presence of anti-Semitism. But I'm a different animal altogether. I am not a part of this.

DS: Has your attitude toward your own identity changed with age? Is it now more Polish, Russian, or Jewish?

KM: No. My identity is Polish, as it has been from my childhood. Once, a reader of *Riding History* in Bystrzyca Kłodzka said that, in fact, I was Kirill. There was a shade of xenophobia in this—that I was Russian. This did not affect me. But a Jew is something different than a Pole or a Russian. This is because of the dispersion of the Jews throughout the world, and also because their distinction is based on the identity of their ancestors, in many instances very distant ancestors—which is a distinction of the Nuremberg, or racist, nature. To be frank, the criteria of Jewishness practiced in Israel have clear racist aspects. On the other hand, to be a Pole or a Russian is just a matter of someone's feeling about themselves.

I have had a choice in my life: either Russianness or Polishness. And I know that one can grow into one, and then into the other.

I like the Russian language and Russian culture, and I have a weak spot for Russians. I often feel for them, also because of their xenophobia—even if they themselves put their necks in that yoke.

This is somehow related to my mother's philosophy. She had some issues with her own identity. At the end of her life she suffered from a slight dementia, but she knew that I was coming to Warsaw for meetings of some kind of Senate. This was in 1991. She listened to me and asked, "Does the Party allow this?" I said, "Mom, there's no Party anymore." She took it easily, but a moment later, "Does the UB allow you to do this?" I told her that the UB didn't exist anymore. "What are you saying, that's not possible. How can the Soviet Union allow this?" I said, "Mom, the Soviet Union has no longer existed for several weeks now either." And she said, "The Soviet Union is no more. . . . Those poor Russians, now everybody will jump on them crying that all this communism was their fault!"

She felt sorry for the Russians, that they were poor and abused by history. She thought they were a martyr nation, even if this was by their own wish. She felt obliged, so to speak, toward her Russianness. I have a similar propensity.

DS: Doesn't this surplus of identity give you a headache?

KM: I liked the Spanish writer Jorge Semprún who wrote in French, especially his first novel, or antinovel, *The Great Voyage*, based on his travel in a train from France to Buchenwald. He was a red Spaniard, a son of a political exile from the Spanish republic. He grew up in Paris and was caught as a partisan in France. Instead of being shot, he was sent to Buchenwald, where he survived until the end of the war. On returning to France on a truck together with other inmates, someone said, "We, Frenchmen . . ." To which he responded contrarily that he was a Spaniard, and in the camp went by "Rot Spanier." They told him that France was his second homeland. To which he said, “Thank you very much, one homeland is enough of a headache, I don’t need another one.” I am with him on this. I’m not sure if I should add the headache of an additional homeland.

DS: What would you pick for your additional homeland?

KM: Poland is enough for me. I feel nothing more than sentiment toward the Russians. Isn’t what I went through enough? Why do need anything more?

NOTES

1. A 2017 interview with Karol Modzelewski by Donata Subbotko, published posthumously in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, May 4, 2019, http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/7,124059,24750193,karol-modzelewski-mama-byla-zaborcza-dobrze-znosila-moje.html , accessed June 13, 2019.

2. The Territorial Defense Forces (Polish: Wojska Obrony Terytorialnej) are a component of Poland’s military made up of professional and part-time volunteer soldiers, established in 2016 as a brainchild of Minister of Defense Antoni Macierewicz.

3. Tadeusz Borowski (1922–1951) was a poet and writer. A concentration camp survivor, he is best known for his cycles of short stories *Pożegnanie z Marią* (*Farewell to Maria*, published in English as *This Way to the Gas, Ladies and Gentleman*). The quotation comes from his poem with the incipit “Nad nami noc.”

4. Stanisław Grzesiuk (1918–1963) was a folk singer and writer notable for his street ballads employing and preserving Warsaw city slang and folklore. He is the author of three autobiographical volumes, *Boso ale w ostrogach* (*Barefoot with Spurs*), *Pięć lat kacetu* (*Five Years in the Lagers*), and *Na marginesie życia* (*The Margins of Life*).

5. Magda Umer (b. 1949) is a singer. She performs high-brow poetry set to popular music.

6. Łucja Prus (1942–2002) was a popular singer. “The Skalds” (Polish: “Skaldowie”) was a rock group popular in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

7. The first stanza of the song *The Sacred War* (Russian: *Sviashchennaia voina*) by Aleksandr Aleksandrov and Vasily Lebedev-Kumach. Translation: “Arise, vast country / Arise for the deathly battle / Against the dark fascist force / Against the cursed horde.”

8. Vladimir Vysotsky (1938–1980) was a singer-songwriter, poet, and actor. An iconic figure, his works, even though banned or barely tolerated by the communist authorities, were immensely popular and influential throughout the Eastern bloc.

9. Muselmann (German for Muslim) was a word in Nazi death camp slang for a prisoner in the state of near-to-death physical and psychological exhaustion who has given up his/her will to live.

10. Powązki Military Cemetery is an old military cemetery in Warsaw. It was declared the state cemetery in 1918. It contains numerous graves of soldiers of different wars, insurgents, and victims of political repressions. The Alley of the Distinguished consists of the graves of prominent public figures, politicians, and artists; it was established in the 1950s.

11. Jerzy Pomianowski (1921–2016) was a writer, translator, and scholar on Eastern Europe.

12. A reference to the medieval battle of Grunwald in which the Polish-Lithuanian forces defeated the German Teutonic Knights.

13. Pat and Patachon (as they were known in German) were a pair of Danish comics active in the 1940s and 1950s, known in Danish as Fyrtårnet og Bivognen. One was tall and slender, and the other was short and fat.

14. See Stanisław Lem, *The Futurological Congress*, translated by Michael Kandel (London: Secker & Warburg, 1974).

Timeline

Compiled by Karol Modzelewski

1937–1938

The peak of Stalinist terror in the USSR.

1937

September 1: Zygmunt Modzelewski, a member of the Central Committee of the French Communist Party and head of its Polish Section, is summoned to Moscow by the Communist International and arrested upon arrival. He is tortured during his two-year imprisonment at Lubyanka.

November 23: Karol Modzelewski is born in Moscow, the son of Alexandr Budnyevich and Natalia Wilter.

December 10: Alexandr Budnyevich is arrested. He is sentenced to eight years in labor camps.

1939

July: Zygmunt Modzelewski is cleared of charges and released from prison. Exhausted, he finds shelter and care with Natalia Wilter, whom he will marry and become the adoptive father of Karol Modzelewski.

August: The Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact establishes the “spheres of interest” of Nazi Germany and the USSR in case of war.

September 1: Nazi Germany invades Poland.

September 17: The Soviet Union invades Poland. The western part of Poland is occupied by Nazi Germany and the eastern part by the USSR. Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov declares that Poland, the bastard of the Versailles Treaty, has disappeared from the map of Europe.

1941

June 22: Nazi Germany invades the Soviet Union.

1943–1945

The clandestine structures of the Polish state exist in Poland under German occupation. They are subject to the London-based Polish government-in-exile, and they include the underground armed force called the Home Army (AK).

The victories of the Soviet armies at Kursk and Stalingrad change the geostrategic situation in Europe. By the spring of 1944, Soviet troops enter the prewar Polish borders, and on January 17, 1945, they capture Warsaw, which had been destroyed by the Nazis during the Polish Warsaw uprising of August–September 1944.

November 28–December 1, 1943: The “Big Three” (Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill) conference in Tehran. Their agreement, then secret, de facto establishes the postwar division of Europe with Poland as a part of the Soviet sphere of influence.

July 22, 1944: In Stalin’s initiative, the Polish Committee of National Liberation (PKWN) is established in Lublin as the prospective Provisional Government of the Republic of Poland.

August 1–October 2, 1944: An uprising in Warsaw is started by the AK against the German occupying forces as the Soviet armies approach the Polish capital. After sixty-two days of bloody fighting, the uprising ends with the surrender of the AK units. Ten thousand insurgents were killed as well as sixty thousand civilians who were murdered by the Nazis by mass executions. The remaining civilian population is expelled from the city, and nearly 80 percent of buildings are burned or demolished by the occupying forces. The Soviet Army that had reached Praga, Warsaw’s left bank, is not permitted to cross the river. The Polish paratrooper brigade stationed in Great Britain is not allowed to provide relief to the insurgents. The Soviets also refuse permission for the British planes that air-drop supplies for the insurgents to land on the airfields near the front.

December 31, 1944: The PKWN becomes the Provisional Government of the Republic of Poland. Zygmunt Modzelewski becomes its ambassador in Moscow.

February 4–11, 1945: The “Big Three” at the Yalta Conference agree on the creation of the Provisional Government of National Unity in liberated Poland. This government is established in June 1945. It is dominated by the communists (PPR) but with the participation of the socialists (PPS), the Peasant Party (PSL), and the Democratic Party (SD). Zygmunt Modzelewski becomes the Deputy Foreign Minister.

November 25, 1945: Karol Modzelewski and his mother move from Moscow to Warsaw to live with Zygmunt Modzelewski.

1947

February: Pluralistic but rigged parliamentary elections are held in Poland. The only opposition party, PSL, is crushed. Its leaders emigrate, are imprisoned, or are marginalized. Those who accept the role of communist satellites form the ZSL. Zygmunt Modzelewski assumes the post of Foreign Minister in the government formed after the election. He will resign in 1950 and die in 1954.

1948–1949

Poland becomes a communist dictatorship. The PPS is gobbled ("unified with") by the PPR into the PZPR. There will be no more pluralist elections. The communists together with the satellite parties (there are no longer any other parties) present a single list with the same number of candidates as the number of seats.

The PPR First Secretary Władysław Gomułka is accused of a "right-wing nationalistic deviation," removed from the Party, and then arrested. Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, the Primate of the Catholic Church in Poland, is under house arrest in a convent. Between 1949 and 1953, Poland, just like other USSR satellite countries, becomes a faithful copy of the Soviet Union under Stalin.

1953

March 5: Stalin's death. His successors denounce the "cult of personality" and embark on a path of limited liberalization, the so-called Thaw. Lavrentiy Beria, the head of the Stalinist political police, is arrested and executed. A mass liberation of political prisoners from Soviet concentration camps follows.

June 17: Strikes in East Germany and workers' demonstrations in East Berlin and Leipzig are crushed by Soviet tanks.

1956

February: The Twentieth Congress of the CPSU. Its Secretary General Nikita Khrushchev in a report read at a closed session denounces Stalinist repressions. He blames the dead dictator and not the dictatorship itself.

February 12: The PZPR Secretary and head of the Polish delegation to the CPSU Congress Bolesław Bierut dies in Moscow. The succession crisis exacerbates the unfolding political crisis in Poland.

June 28: A general strike and street demonstrations take place in Poznań. The militia and army open fire; seventy-four people are killed.

October 19–20: The "Polish October." Gomułka and the Party "liberals" form a new leadership of the PZPR without consulting Moscow. Gomułka becomes first secretary again. The Soviet delegation headed by

Khrushchev unexpectedly arrives in Warsaw but encounters resistance from the Polish Central Committee. Two armored divisions of the Soviet Army advance toward Warsaw. The workers of four Warsaw factories prepare to defend themselves in their factories. The Soviet delegation leaves with no results. In two weeks, Gomułka goes to Moscow and is recognized by the Kremlin. The Red Army units return to their barracks in Legnica and the Baltic coast.

October 23–November 8: A revolution in Hungary is crushed by the Soviet Army.

1957

Gomułka restores “the leadership role of the Party” including its control over the press and youth organizations. The lasting results of the Polish October include the abandonment of forced collectivization in agriculture, normalization of state–Catholic Church relations, legally guaranteed autonomy of universities, and liberalization of censorship. This appeasement, nicknamed the “little stabilization,” lasts until 1968.

1963–1964

The hardening of Party politics in Poland.

1965

March 18: Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski distribute their contentious manifesto titled “An Open Letter to the Party” at Warsaw University. The next day they are arrested and in July 1965 sentenced to three years and three and a half years, respectively.

1966–1967

Political disquiet among students. Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski are released from prison after serving two-thirds of their sentences. In the summer of 1967 they get in touch with young dissenters at Warsaw University.

1968

January–August: “Prague Spring”—the democratization of the system initiated by the leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. It is crushed on August 21 by the invasion of five Warsaw Pact countries: the USSR, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, and East Germany.

March 8–28: Student protests in university towns all over Poland. Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski are arrested again on March 8. They are named the principal instigators of the student protests and sentenced to three and a half years in prison. The autonomy in higher education that had been a law since 1956 is abolished. The Party conducts a purge among faculty, expels or drafts thousands of students, and initiates an official anti-Semitic campaign.

1970

December 13: A hike on official food prices is announced.

December 14–19: Strikes in Gdańsk and Szczecin shipyards and workers' protests are held. The police and army shoot at the protesters—forty-four people are dead.

December 20, 1970: Gomułka is removed from the post of first secretary. His successor, Edward Gierek, seeks reconciliation with the workers and intellectuals.

1971

September 18: Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski are released from prison.

1976

June 24: The authorities announce new price hikes. Strikes and demonstrations are held in Radom, Ursus, Płock, and other towns. In Radom the protesters burn the Party headquarters. The ZOMO intervenes without using firearms, but the arrested workers are beaten, tortured, and given draconian sentences (up to ten years in prison). Many thousands of participants in the strikes are laid off, which in a communist country means permanently losing their livelihoods.

September 23: A group of well-known dissidents (including Jacek Kuroń, Antoni Macierewicz, and Adam Michnik), doyens of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), veterans of World War II resistance, as well as prominent writers and scholars form the Workers' Defense Committee (KOR) to aid the workers persecuted for the June strikes and protests. A democratic opposition movement emerges around KOR, relatively strong even if not accepted by the state. Against this opposition the government uses harassment and selective repressions, but does not attempt to crush it by force.

1980

August 17: The strike at the Gdańsk Shipyard spreads to other factories and places on the Baltic coast. The Inter-Factory Striking Committee (MKS) is formed, headed by Lech Wałęsa, an electrician from the Gdańsk Shipyard. The MKS draws up a list of twenty-one demands. The principal demand is for the government’s authorization to create free trade unions—alongside the official trade unions subjected to the Party—that would be independent of the Party and factory management. Other demands include the recognition of the right to strike, limitation of censorship, release of political prisoners, and increase of wages to offset inflation. Besides Gdańsk, multifactory striking committees emerge in Szczecin, Wrocław, Warsaw, Kraków, Poznań, Łódź, Wałbrzych, and in the Upper Silesian mines. By the end of August the strike encompasses almost 700 factories and 700,000 workers in Poland. The government enters into the negotiations with the Gdańsk MKS headed by Wałęsa.

August 31: The Governmental Commission and the Gdańsk MKS sign the Gdańsk Accord, in which the government accepts the basic demands of the strikers. The interfactory committees become the Founding Committees for new unions.

September 6: Edward Gierek resigns as Party first secretary. Stanisław Kania is elected to this post.

September 17: The Founding Committees from all regions in Poland meet in Gdańsk. Karol Modzelewski chairs the Wrocław delegation. On behalf of four regions (Wrocław, Wałbrzych, Warszawa, and Poznań) he presents a draft of a resolution on uniting regional union structures into one countrywide union called the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union Solidarity. Lech Wałęsa backs this motion, which is accepted by acclamation. Wałęsa is elected chairman of Solidarity.

October 11: The Supreme Court formally registers Solidarity. The KKP (the Union’s provisional governing body until the countrywide congress) appoints Karol Modzelewski as the Union’s spokesman.

December 8: Fourteen Soviet Army divisions, two Czechoslovak divisions, and two East German divisions are concentrated at the Polish borders, ostensibly for military exercises code named “Soyuz-81.” Their plan includes the encirclement of Poland’s major cities and industrial centers. As a result of a telephone conversation between Carter and Brezhnev, this plan is abandoned.

1981

October 30: Stanislaw Kania resigns as Party first secretary. The Central Committee appoints General Wojciech Jaruzelski, already Minister of Defense and prime minister. The general thus concentrates in his hands triple power over the Party, state, and army.

December 13: A military coup against Solidarity. The army and police arrest members of the KK in Gdańsk, forcibly enter and vandalize the Union's regional headquarters, occupy television and radio, deactivate the telephone network, and introduce a curfew across the country. Martial law is declared. Nearly five thousand people, mostly Union activists, are locked up in prisons transformed into “places of internment.” Many factories go on strike and are stormed by the ZOMO assisted by the army. In Upper Silesia, where the strike’s scope is nearly universal, the ZOMO fires on the strikers in the “Wujek” mine, killing nine workers. Once the strikes are suppressed, the clandestine resistance of Solidarity begins; now it is no longer a mass movement but a relatively restricted anticommunist conspiracy.

1985

Mikhail Gorbachev is elected secretary general of the CPSU. Perestroika is launched—a program for the USSR modernization and liberalization and openness to the West.

1988

August 15: Strikes in ten mines in Upper Silesia. The strikers are not connected with the Solidarity underground, but they demand, in addition to wage increases, the relegalization of Solidarity. General Jaruzelski’s team makes contact with Wałęsa and his advisors. The idea of Round Table negotiations between the government and the Solidarity opposition appears.

August 22: The Gdańsk Shipyard goes on strike with the legalization of Solidarity as its principal demand.

August 31: The first meeting between Wałęsa, General Czesław Kiszczak, and the Church mediator archbishop Jerzy Dąbrowski. Wałęsa calls for stopping the strikes.

1989–1990

February 6: The Round Table negotiations begin. They lead to the relegalization of Solidarity, semi-free elections for the lower chamber (the Sejm), and free elections for the Senate.

June 4: The “negotiated” parliamentary elections—for the Sejm 65 percent of the seats are guaranteed to the candidates of the Party and its allies, and 35 percent are allotted for free elections, whereas the elections for Senate are free. The results: 99 out of 100 Senate seats are taken by candidates of the Solidarity Civic Committee. In the Sejm, the “negotiation” is respected, but deputies are often sympathizers of the opposition. Karol Modzelewski is elected a senator from Wrocław with 75 percent of the vote.

July: General Jaruzelski, despite a theoretically guaranteed secure majority, is elected the president of the Republic of Poland by a majority of only two votes of the National Assembly (the Sejm and the Senate).

The former satellite parties (the farmers’ PSL and the SD) renounce their alliance with the Party and align with the Citizens’ Parliamentary Club Solidarity.

August 19: The leading Solidarity advisor, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, is nominated as prime minister and forms a coalition government with PSL and SD. The communists retain the Ministries of Defense and Internal Affairs. Karol Modzelewski maintains a critical distance regarding the post-Solidarity camp taking on governmental responsibilities, whereas Jacek Kuroń decides to become Minister of Labor.

November 25: Jaruzelski resigns as Poland’s president. The presidential election is called according to new electoral rules, that is, universal suffrage. Lech Wałęsa becomes the president of Poland.

December 31–February 2: Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Leszek Balcerowicz presents to both chambers a program of neoliberal “shock therapy” called the “Balcerowicz plan.” The Sejm adopts it unanimously. In the Senate, Karol Modzelewski criticizes the plan, and together with six other senators votes against it (seven nay votes out of 100).

January 1990: The Sejm decides to dissolve and calls for free parliamentary elections. Karol Modzelewski decides not to run for office and goes back to Wrocław University and then to Warsaw University, where he is appointed chair of medieval history.

1990–2015

Liberal democracy in Poland.

2004

May 1: Poland joins the European Union.

2015

The populist party Law and Justice (PiS) wins the presidential and parliamentary elections. With 38 percent of the vote, it gets a majority of eight seats in the Sejm as well as an overwhelming majority in the Senate. With durable popular support by the players in society who have been disappointed by liberal democracy, PiS gradually introduces the structures of an authoritarian state.

2019

April 28: Karol Modzelewski dies in Warsaw.

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